The

AMERICAN SCHOLAR

WINTER 1999 · $6.95 / $9.00 Canada

REMEMBERING ALFRED KAZIN

Morris Dickstein, Michael Kazin, Jonathan Rosen, Sean Wilentz, Antonio Dajer, and Judith Dunford

GHANA, 1963

David Levering Lewis

LOREN EISELEY

Vivian Gornick

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF HONOR

Eugen Weber

ARENDT AND EICHMANN AT DINNER

Anthony Grafton

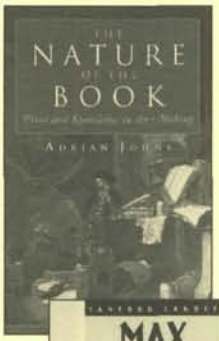
JOURNAL

Vaslav Nijinsky

FEB 22 1999

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New from CHICAGO



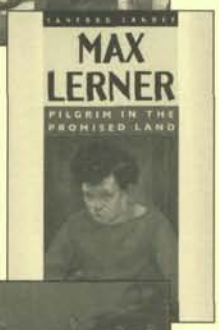
The Nature of the Book

Print and Knowledge in the Making

ADRIAN JOHNS

"A scholarly investigation of printing's early cultural history in England. . . . Relying on detailed knowledge of original texts and a magisterial view of the enormous secondary literature, Johns has written a fine-grained study with considerable force of argument."—*Kirkus Reviews*

Cloth $40.00



Max Lerner

Pilgrim in the Promised Land

SANFORD LAKOFF

"*Max Lerner: Pilgrim in the Promised Land* is a fair, honest, and vivid portrait of one of the notable American public intellectuals of the century. Sanford Lakoff's perceptive biography illuminates both Lerner's complex life and his turbulent times."—Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Cloth $25.00

Why the American Century?

OLIVIER ZUNZ

"Written as elegant, interlocked essays, this utterly original book convincingly places new forms of social knowledge about mass consumption, domesticated and racialized pluralism, and assertive internationalism at the center of America's ascendance in the first half of this century."—Ira Katznelson, author of *Liberalism's Crooked Circle: Letters to Adam Michnik*

Cloth $24.00

Seductive Journey

American Tourists in France from Jefferson to the Jazz Age

HARVEY LEVENSTEIN

"Levenstein's book is aptly named, for he lures us with the experiences of others through history. . . . Most significantly, though, the author traces the effect Americans in Paris had on tourism in Europe throughout the ages—and does it in a fun, almost rollicking fashion." —*Booklist*

Cloth $30.00

Mesmerized

Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain

ALISON WINTER

"A cracking work. Alison Winter explores the people's greatest participatory science with great insight in order to ask the bigger questions about persuasion, boundaries, and who controlled the Victorian state of mind. There is no prejudging here—the mesmerists had everything to play for in Winter's deft recreation of their eerie world."—Adrian Desmond, author of *Huxley: From Devil's Disciple to Evolution's High Priest*

Cloth $30.00

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

5801 S. Ellis Avenue, Chicago IL 60637 www.press.uchicago.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The

AMERICAN SCHOLAR

PUBLISHED
by
The PHI BETA KAPPA *Society*

WINTER 1999

VOL. 68, NO. 1

Life is our dictionary.
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, "The American Scholar," 1837

Editorial Board

NICHOLSON BAKER
JOEL E. COHEN
RENÉE C. FOX
JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN
ADAM GOODHEART
VARTAN GREGORIAN
WERNER GUNDERSHEIMER
NEIL HARRIS
DAVID LEVERING LEWIS
PAUL McHUGH
MATTHEW MESELSON
PHYLLIS ROSE
EDWARD ROTHSTEIN
WENDY WASSERSTEIN
EUGEN WEBER

Poetry Board

RITA DOVE
HEATHER McHUGH
PAUL MULDOON

ANNE FADIMAN, *Editor*
FREDERICK J. CROSSON, *Consulting Editor*
JOHN T. BETHELL, *Senior Editor*
JEAN STIPICEVIC, *Managing Editor*
SANDRA COSTICH, *Associate Editor*
RICHARD NICHOLLS, *Literary Editor*
ROBERT FARNSWORTH, *Poetry Editor*
ANDRÉ BERNARD *and* SHERWIN B. NULAND, *Contributing Editors*

DOUGLAS W. FOARD, *Publisher*
PEGGY FERRIN, *Associate Publisher*
EDNA NWABUFO, *Subscription Manager*
LYNETTE EDWARDS, *Subscription Assistant*

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, a quarterly journal of literature, science, and culture, has been published for a general readership since 1932 by the Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Fourth Floor, Washington, D.C. 20036. ISSN 0003-0937. Fax: 202-265-0083. E-mail: scholar@pbk.org. For subscription information, call 800-821-4567. Subscription rates: for individuals, $25 one year, $48 two years, $69 three years; institutions, $30 one year, $58 two years; single copies mailed upon request, $8; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $3 a year for postage. Periodical postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. Copyright ©1999 by the Phi Beta Kappa Society. Printed in the U.S.A. Postmaster: Send all address changes to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Fourth Floor, Washington, D.C. 20036. Unsolicited manuscripts should be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope; no responsibility is assumed for loss or damage. Opinions expressed in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR are those of the author of each article and not necessarily those of the Editor, the Editorial Board, or the officers of the Phi Beta Kappa Society. U.S. newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 250 West 55th Street, New York, New York 10019. **Direct advertising inquiries to Peggy Ferrin, 20410 Settlers Valley, San Antonio, Texas 78258; tel. 210-497-1914; fax 210-497 1982; e-mail MFerrin000@aol.com.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Acorns and Oaks

Parvis e glandibus quercus. One of the tallest oaks in this issue did indeed grow from a very small acorn. More than a year ago, I read an essay by David Levering Lewis called "From Eurocentrism to Polycentrism," in which the Rutgers historian explained how his primary field of interest had evolved from French history to African and African American history. The essay contained the following sentence, describing Lewis's activities in 1963: "I taught European Medieval and Renaissance history to some of the brightest students in my career to date and tried to remain neutral in the swirl of debate, rumor, and conspiracies in Nkrumah's Ghana."

I had the feeling that that brief sentence might contain more than met the eye. Would Lewis be interested in writing at greater length about his year in Ghana?

The result is "Ghana, 1963," an account of an extraordinary time and place that, as an international magnet for intellectuals, reminds Lewis "of Paris in the time of Abelard, or, even more, of Greece during the wars of independence, if it's not too grandiose to compare our rather scraggly bunch with Shelley and Byron." When Lewis wrote it, he was halfway through the second volume of *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race.* (The first volume won the Bancroft Prize, the Francis Parkman Prize, and the Pulitzer Prize.) When I asked him whether the experience of writing "Ghana, 1963" might lead someday to a full-length intellectual autobiography, Lewis replied, "It's a vainglorious prospect. There's been a recent hemorrhage of books that might be subtitled 'My Historical Significance,' and I'm not sure I wish to add to the glut. On the other hand, this memoir was such an interesting exercise that it may just push me off the precipice."

Every year two major anthologies of American essays are published. The most recent editions, containing essays that appeared in 1997, both honored Joseph Epstein's last year as editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. *The Anchor Essay Annual: The Best of 1998,* edited by Phillip Lopate, included one of Epstein's last SCHOLAR essays. *The Best American Essays 1998,* edited by Cynthia Ozick, included three selections from the SCHOLAR (by Jeremy Bernstein, Brian Doyle, and Joseph Epstein), more than from any other magazine except *The New Yorker.*

A. F.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

· CONTENTS ·

AT LARGE AND AT SMALL ..... *Philonoë* 5

COMMONPLACE BOOK ..... *collected by André Bernard* 10

ARTICLES

Remembering Alfred Kazin 13

"I'm Interested in Everything!" ..... *Morris Dickstein* 13

The Burning Soul ..... *Michael Kazin* 22

Alfred Kazin's Tie ..... *Jonathan Rosen* 24

Listening to the Sea ..... *Sean Wilentz* 27

My Fellow American ..... *Antonio Dajer* 30

Notes from Mrs. K. ..... *Judith Dunford* 33

Ghana, 1963 ..... *David Levering Lewis* 39

http://www.when_is_enough_enough?.com ..... *Paul De Palma* 61

Loren Eiseley: Excavating the Self ..... *Vivian Gornick* 73

The Ups and Downs of Honor ..... *Eugen Weber* 79

Laura Riding: A Modernist Puzzle ..... *Victor M. Cassidy* 93

Arendt and Eichmann at the Dinner Table ..... *Anthony Grafton* 105

THE UNCERTAIN ART ..... *Sherwin B. Nuland* 121

JOURNAL ..... *Vaslav Nijinsky* 125

BOOKS

REREADING: Stead Made Me Do It ..... *Michael Upchurch* 130

The Book Is Here to Stay ..... *Alex Soojung-Kim Pang* 136

REVIEWS ..... *Amy L. Blair, Susan Miron, Tess Lewis, Jeffrey Meyers* 139

POETRY

Perennial ..... *Wendy Barker* 36

Another Christmas ..... *Donald Hall* 38

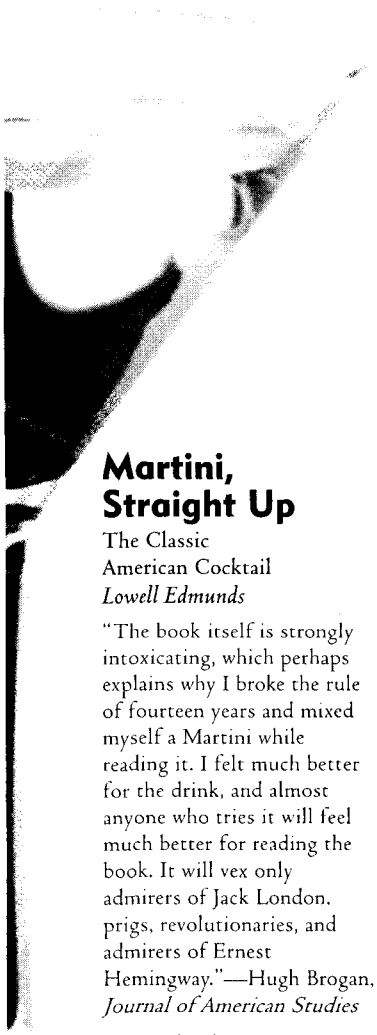
Kant's Friend Al ..... *Laurence Lerner* 92

THE READER REPLIES 155

THE PODIUM ..... *Sara Paretsky* 160

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the good life



Martini, Straight Up

The Classic American Cocktail

Lowell Edmunds

"The book itself is strongly intoxicating, which perhaps explains why I broke the rule of fourteen years and mixed myself a Martini while reading it. I felt much better for the drink, and almost anyone who tries it will feel much better for reading the book. It will vex only admirers of Jack London, prigs, revolutionaries, and admirers of Ernest Hemingway."—Hugh Brogan, *Journal of American Studies*

$24.95 hardcover

Read Chapter One at www.press.jhu.edu

The Harmony of Nature and Spirit

Volume Three of *Meaning in Life*

Irving Singer

"Irving Singer has many wise and instructive things to say about happiness and how we can get beyond suffering in life. His discussion of the love of life as contrasted with the love of love . . . is a profoundly important one. It is a gold mine for those who wish to better understand the intellectual foundations of the good life."—Marvin Kohl, The New School of Social Research

$15.95paperback

Escapism

Yi-Fu Tuan

"This lovely book provides the inspiration to think differently about things, ideas, and experiences, great and small. Tuan's central theme is culture as escape from nature—and from human nature. It is a work that is challenging in the most positive way, a book with many wonderful insights expressed in a lucid, original language."—Edmunds V. Bunkse, University of Delaware

$28.00 hardcover

Read Chapter One at www.press.jhu.edu

Tocqueville

A Biography

André Jardin

translated by Lydia Davis, with Robert Hemenway

"More than any of his contemporaries—more than Marx, more than Mill, much more than Mazzini, Comte or Proudhon—[Tocqueville] is the man for the late twentieth century. It is the triumph of André Jardin's biography that it shows so clearly how this is so."—Hugh Brogan, *Times Literary Supplement*

$19.95 paperback

Dickens

A Biography

Fred Kaplan

with a new preface

"The novelist who emerges from [Kaplan's] study—dynamic, mercurial, self-deluding, with a big heart for the masses and a small one for his ego, makes fascinating reading."—Louis Auchincloss, *Newsday*

$19.95 paperback

Out of My Life and Thought

Albert Schweitzer

foreword by Jimmy Carter

"Allows us to glimpse the real Albert Schweitzer, a man whose moral example is as relevant and compelling in the 1990s as it was in the 1930s."—*Los Angeles Times*

$15.95 paperback

the johns hopkins university press

1-800-537-5487 • www.press.jhu.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AT LARGE AND AT SMALL

Night Owl

PHILONOË

My husband and I sleep in a white wooden bed whose head posts are surmounted by two birds, carved and painted by an artist friend. On George's side there is a meadowlark, brown of back, yellow of breast, with a black pectoral V as trig and sporty as the neck of a tennis sweater. On my side there is a snowy owl, more muted in coloration, its feathers a frowsy tessellation of white and black. *Sturnella magna* and *Nyctea scandiaca* have one thing in common: they are both fast asleep, their eyes shut tight, their beaks resting peacefully on their breasts.

Alas, the lark and the owl who rest beneath their wooden familiars have a far harder time synchronizing their circadian rhythms. George is an early riser, a firm believer in seizing the day while it is still fresh. I am not fully alive until the sun sets. In the morning, George is quick and energetic, while I blink in the sunlight, move as if through honey, and pour salt in the coffee. When we turn off the light at 11:30—too late for him, too early for me—George falls instantly asleep, while I, mocked by the bird that slumbers above my head, arrange and rearrange the pillows, searching for the elusive cool sides, trying in vain to construct an irresistibly narcotic nest.

In the fourth century B.C., Androsthenes, a scribe who accompanied Alexander the Great to India, observed that the tamarind tree opened its leaves during the day and folded them at night. He assumed that it was worshiping the sun. Twenty-two centuries later, the great Swedish taxonomist Carolus Linnaeus designed a flower clock—a circular garden whose twelve wedge-shaped flower beds, each planted with species whose petals opened at a different hour, told the time from 6:00 A.M. (white water lily) to 6:00 P.M. (evening primrose). In humans, the circadian clock is centered in the suprachiasmatic nucleus, a freckle-sized, sickle-shaped cluster of nerve cells in the hypothalamus, but it can be activated by proteins produced by genes all over the body. Last spring, scientists at Cornell succeeded in resetting human biological clocks (though only temporarily) by shining bright lights on the backs of people's knees, suggesting that the mechanisms for controlling sleeping and waking are embedded in nearly every human cell—as well as in every flower petal, every insect antenna, every bird wing.

Chronobiologists have also established that out of every ten people, eight follow a normal circadian cycle (that is, rising naturally at around 7:30 A.M.); one is a lark; and one is an owl. These settings are genetically encoded and cannot be erased. Once an owl, always an owl. (The same goes for other species. Wilse Webb, a psychologist at the University of Florida, spent five years trying to teach rats not to sleep between noon and 6:00 P.M. "They, by their contrary nature," he told Lynne Lamberg, an expert on sleep patterns, "spent five years teaching me otherwise.") I would wager my softest down pillow that the Cornell scientist who thought up the light-on-the-backs-of-the-knees experiment was an owl. At 8:00 A.M., could any biologist dream up something so lunatic (from *luna,* moon), so surreal, so redolent of the punchy wee hours and so incompatible with the rational light of morning?

"When I write after dark," observed Cyril Connolly, "the shades of evening scatter their purple through my prose. Then why not write in the morning? Unfortunately in my case there is never very much of the morning, and it is curious that although I do not despise people who go to bed earlier than I, almost everyone is impatient with me for not getting up." Connolly put his finger on the human owl's perennial problem. The natural world discov-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ered the benefits of shift work long ago: it is easier to share a given territory when everyone is not out and about at once. No one faults the bandicoot for prowling after dusk; no one chides the night-flying cecropia moth for its decadence; no one calls the whippoorwill a lazy slugabed for sleeping by day and singing by night—but people who were born to follow similar rhythms are viewed by the other nine-tenths of the population as a tad threadbare in the moral fiber department.

"Those who would bring great things to pass," cautioned the eighteenth-century theologian Matthew Henry, "must rise early." In the medieval Benedictine horarium, the first of the monk's seven daily offices was observed at 3:15 A.M., the better to get a corner on virtue before anyone else could take a grab. And at 4:30 A.M., is it any surprise that in 1660 one would have found John Milton, lustrous with matutinal rectitude, listening to a servant read aloud from the Hebrew Bible, while in 1890, one would have found the Irish journalist and pornographer Frank Harris (on the rare nights when he was sleeping alone) finally nodding off after a night of unspeakable debauch?

The owl's reputation may be beyond salvation. Who gets up early? Farmers, bakers, doctors. Who stays up late? Muggers, cat burglars, streetwalkers. It's assumed that if you're sneaking around after midnight, you must have something to hide. Night is the time of goblins, ghouls, vampires, zombies, witches, warlocks, demons, wraiths, fiends, banshees, poltergeists, werefolk, bogeymen, and things that go bump. (It is also the time of fairies and angels, but, like many comforting things, these are all too easily crowded out of the imagination by the frightening ones. The nightmare trumps the pleasant dream.) Night, like winter, is a metaphor for death: one does not say "the dead of morning" or "the dead of spring." In a strange and tenebrous book called *Night* (which every lark should be forced to read, preferably by moonlight), the British critic A. Alvarez (an owl) points out, glumly, that Christ is known as the Light of the World and Satan as the Prince of Darkness. With such a powerful pro-lark tradition arrayed against us, must we owls be forever condemned to the infernal regions—which, despite their inextinguishable flames, are always described as *dark?*

I have tried hard to understand the lark's perspective. My former editor Campbell Geeslin, who is also the artist who carved our bedpost finials, retires at nine and rises at five. "I've gotten up early ever since I was a boy in West Texas," he told me. "You'd look out of the window at dawn, and the sky would stretch on forever. It was a special creamy color at that hour, before the clouds came. It was the only time when it was cool. The morning was clean and blank and full of promise, like a piece of paper no one had written on yet. I couldn't wait to jump out of bed and invent something: a car, an airplane, a vacuum cleaner made from a spice can. By sunset, the day was used up, exhausted. Night was a time of disappointment, when you thought about all the things you'd hoped to do and hadn't done. There's nothing as sad and lonely as the bark of a coyote somewhere off in the West Texas night, and the moon hanging outside your window as bone-white as an old cow skull."

That's all very persuasive, but it's not going to make me jump out of bed at five any more than a panegyric by a white water lily on the splendors of the morning is going to make the evening primrose transplant itself in Linnaeus's 6:00 A.M. flower bed. My suprachiasmatic nucleus is stuck in the owl position, and there's nothing I can do about it. Dawns are all very well (though I generally see them after staying up all night, when I may be too sleepy to appreciate them), but they can't hold a candle to a full moon, an aurora borealis, a meteor shower, or a comet.

In March of 1986, I was climbing with a friend on the Tasman Glacier in New Zealand. It suddenly occurred to us that if we got up at 1:00 A.M. and walked northeast across the glacier, we might be able to see Halley's comet, which was making its every-seventy-sixth-year swing that month and could be best viewed (or so we had read) from the Southern Hemisphere. For my larkish companion, 1:00 A.M. was an early start; for me, it was simply a way to postpone my bedtime. We left the Tasman Saddle promptly at one, roped up, and put on our crampons in what seemed at first like pitch darkness but soon, once our eyes grew accustomed to the light of thousands of stars reflected on the shimmering glacier, seemed more like dusk. After crunching a mile or so across

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the clean hard snow, which had been unpleasantly slushy in the afternoon sun, we stopped on a narrow col with a thousand-foot drop-off on the either side. And there it was: a small white cornucopia above the northern horizon, not solid, but delicately stippled, as if produced by a heavenly dot-matrix printer. We spread our sleeping bags on the snow and crawled inside. The vantage point was dizzying. It was impossible to tell whether the comet was above us or we were above the comet; we were both falling through space, missing the stars by inches.

Surely the best thing about camping is the night. Night is what differentiates a camping trip from a series of day hikes. There are few greater pleasures than stretching out in your tent, where a glowing candle lantern makes your muddy boots and damp wool socks look as if they were painted by Georges de La Tour, and glimpsing, through the open door, the corner of a constellation that is invisible from your hometown. (Since I live in New York City, that includes just about everything, even the Big Dipper.) There are sounds you wouldn't hear at home, either: crickets, cicadas, tree frogs, loons, owls—even, on a memorable Catskills backpacking trip in my husband's youth, the urgent rustles of copulating porcupines. The contrast between the infinite space outside the tent and the cozily delimited interior, whose little zippers and pouches (for glasses, handkerchiefs, pocketknives) form a miniature simulacrum of a well-ordered pantry, nudges my memory back to the houses I used to make in my childhood by suspending a blanket over a table, dragging in a tray of cocoa and cookies, and creating a private domestic zone in which the temperature was always warm and the light was always crepuscular. Hell may be a dark place, but so is the womb.

My husband inherited his larkishness, along with his Roman nose and his shaggy eyebrows, from his father, who would feel he had committed an act of irreparable sloth if he slept past 4:30 A.M. I inherited my owlishness from a father who shares Jimmy Walker's conviction that it is a sin to go to bed on the same day you get up. Even if he retires at 2:00 A.M., my father cannot fall asleep without at least an hour of rigorous mental games. (He is the sort of person who could never get drowsy counting sheep; he once told me that he just got wider and wider awake as the numbers mounted, since he had to make sure he was counting correctly.) He composes puns, limericks, clerihews, palindromes, anagrams, and alphabetical lists of various kinds. An example of the last of these genres: Excluding the refractory *x*, which was long ago thrown out of the game, proceed through the alphabet from *a* to *z*, finding words that end with the letters *el*. Proper names are allowed. Solution: Abel, babel, channel, diesel, Edel, Fidel, Gödel . . . and so on. The sailing was reasonably clear until my father got to *z*, a perennial troublemaker. It took an hour, from 4:00 A.M. to 5:00 A.M., to come up with the name of a fellow reviewer at the *Nation* whom he had last seen sixty years before: Morton Dauwen Zabel. My father says that at the moment Mr. Zabel sidled into his consciousness, he was suffused with a sense of transcendent completion greater than he had ever felt on signing a book contract or closing a deal.

Insomnia need not be disagreeable. When Annie Proulx can't sleep, she puts on Quebec reels and dances around for half an hour in her bunny slippers. Until the fantasy wore thin with repetition, F. Scott Fitzgerald quarterbacked the Princeton team to hundreds of nocturnal victories over Yale. Lewis Carroll, like my father, posed himself problems:

> Q: If 70 per cent [of a group of pensioners] have lost an eye, 75 per cent an ear, 80 per cent an arm, 85 per cent a leg; what percentage, *at least*, must have lost all four?
>
> A: Ten. Adding the wounds together, we get 70 + 75 + 80 + 85 = 310, among 100 men; which gives 3 to each, and 4 to 10 men. Therefore the least percentage is 10.

Not everyone's cup of somnifacient tea—but, as Carroll put it, "I believe that an hour of calculation is much better for me than half-an-hour of worry."

I feel certain that Morton Dauwen Zabel would never have paid my father an extrasensory visit during the day, nor would Lewis Carroll have performed his amputations with such accuracy had he been operating when the rest of the world was awake. Owls think bet-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ter at night. It may be true that, on the average, people make more mistakes when they stay up late. The *Exxon Valdez* ran aground at 12:04 A.M.; the pesticide tank at Bhopal ruptured at 12:40 A.M.; the Chernobyl reactor exploded at 1:23 A.M.; the reactor at Three Mile Island spewed radiation at 3:53 A.M. These accidents were all attributable to human error. But surely the humans who made the errors were among the non-owl 90 percent: day folk, maybe even dyed-in-the-wool larks, who had been forced by the exigencies of shift work to disobey the ticking of their circadian clocks. At Three Mile Island, the workers had just rotated to the night shift *that very day* and must have been as groggy as a planeful of New Yorkers disembarking in Tehran.

It was therefore with great unease that I read *Night as Frontier,* a book by a Boston University sociologist named Murray Melbin. Melbin believes that night, like the American West in the nineteenth century, is a territory to be colonized. We have run out of space, so if we wish to increase our productivity and uncrowd our cities, the only dimension we have left to occupy is time: the hours after the normal workday. Already, many factories have discovered that it is cheaper to operate around the clock, even if wages are higher on the nonstandard shifts. If Melbin is right, those factory night-workers—along with locksmiths, bartenders, bail bondsmen, twenty-four-hour-gas-station attendants, police officers, paramedics, security guards, taxi drivers, talk-show hosts, and suicide hotline volunteers—are the advance wave of a vast nocturnal migration. There are many parallels between night work and the settlement of the Western frontier: the pioneers tend to be young and nonconformist; the population is sparse; authority is decentralized (supervisors are asleep); life is informal (no coats and ties required); there are hardships (fatigue, isolation, disruption of family routines) and lawlessness (parking-lot muggings). Melbin may be right. But in my view, if the night is like the Wild West, *let's leave it that way.* If too many settlers start putting down stakes in the territory beyond midnight, California is going to happen. The wide open spaces will become the Los Angeles freeway system, and with too few owls behind the wheel, there will be lots of accidents.

Because I savor the illusion of having the small hours to myself, when I am in the city I prefer to spend them at home. The noirish melancholy of the after-hours club and the all-night diner suits many owls, but I'd rather be in our bedroom, looking out the window every once in a while at the flocks of chic, black-garbed young couples, their laughter floating upwards through the night, who cross the pool of lamplight at Houston and West Broadway. Even if the city were safer, I doubt I would go for late walks. Dickens once had a period of insomnia during which he spent several nights walking the London streets between half past twelve and half past five: Haymarket, Newgate Prison, Bethlehem Hospital, Westminster Bridge, Covent Garden. He was searching for comfort but found only drunkards, thieves, rain, shadows, silence, and scudding clouds "as restless as an evil conscience in a tumbled bed." The night he described in *The Uncommercial Traveller* is not the sable goddess of Edward Young or the bare-bosomed nurturer that Walt Whitman beseeched to press him close; it is more like the horrid place of "distempered gloom of thought / And deadly weariness of heart" that James Thomson visited in "The City of Dreadful Night," the most depressing of all night poems. For Dickens, as for me, the urban night was best enjoyed indoors, preferably with a book in hand.

"There is absolutely no such thing as reading, but by a candle," wrote Charles Lamb.

> We have tried the affectation of a book at noon-day in gardens, and in sultry arbours; but it was labour thrown away. Those gay motes in the beam come about you, hovering and teazing, like so many coquets, that will have you all to their self, and are jealous of your abstractions. By the midnight taper, the writer digests his meditations. By the same light, we must approach to their perusal, if we would catch the flame, the odour.

I prefer a 150-watt halogen bulb, but I know just what Lamb meant. Reading by day seems prosaic and businesslike, the stuff of duty rather than of pleasure. When I was ten or twelve, I would close my schoolbooks without protest at bedtime, but after my mother left

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the room, I'd flip the switch of my bedside lamp and snatch a stolen hour (or two or three) of novel reading, my heart beating wildly if I heard footsteps in the hall. Had my mother glimpsed the light under the door? She always had the grace to pretend she hadn't. Her steps would grow fainter, the book would grow shorter, and I would fall asleep at an ungodly hour with the goody-goody's delight at having sinned.

The child who reads at night is likely to become the adult who writes at night. During the day, I pop out of my chair a dozen times an hour. The phone rings, the fax beeps, the mailbox needs to be checked, the milk needs to be bought, the coffee needs to be made, the letter needs to be filed, the paper clips and Post-its need to be rearranged *right this instant.* How can the writer's distractive sirens be resisted? During a phase when the muse was particularly obdurate, John McPhee used to tie himself to his chair with his bathrobe sash. Friedrich Schiller heightened his powers of concentration by inhaling the fumes from a cache of rotten apples he kept in a drawer. All I need to do is stay up past midnight.

Something amazing happens when the rest of the world is sleeping. I am glued to my chair. I forget that I ever wanted to do anything but write. The crowded city, the crowded apartment, and the crowded calendar suddenly seem spacious. Three or four hours pass in a moment; I have no idea what time it is, because I never check the clock. If I chose to listen, I could hear the swish of taxis bound for downtown discos or the soft saxophone riffs that drift from a neighbor's window, but nothing gets through. I am suspended in a sensory deprivation tank, and the very lack of sensation is delicious.

A few years ago, I was inching along with excruciating slowness on a book I was trying to write. It was clear that the only way I would finish it was by surrendering unconditionally to my owl self. For several months, I worked all night, ate breakfast with my family, and slept from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. The pages piled up with preternatural speed. The only problem was that even though my husband and I inhabited the same zip code, he was living on New York time and I had apparently moved to Auckland. The jet lag on weekends was terrible.

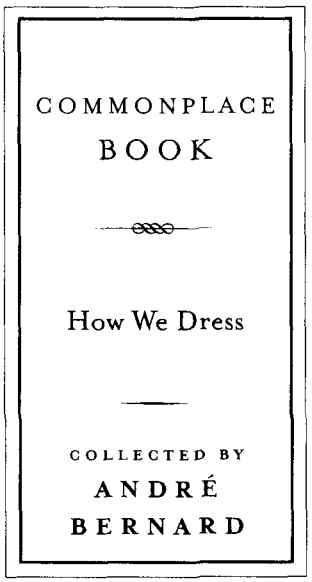
I finished the book and promised I'd never do it again, except for occasional binges of three or four nights: just long enough to write an essay. I have kept my word. I am even more attached to George than I am to my circadian rhythm, so the benefits have been many. And unlike most recovering alcoholics, I seem to be able to indulge in a bender now and then without permanently falling off the wagon.

It is now 3:42 A.M. Everyone has been asleep for hours except my daughter's hamster, the other nocturnal mammal in the family, who is busy carrying sunflower seeds from one end of his terrarium to the other. After Silkie completes this task, he will change his mind and bring the seeds back again. I will do more or less the same thing with several paragraphs. Then, when the light breaks over Houston Street and the pigeons begin to coo on the window ledge, Silkie and I will retire. "And so by faster and faster degrees," wrote Dickens at the end of his long night walk, "until the last degrees were very fast, the day came, and I was tired and could sleep." Good night.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He that is to be hanged, or otherwise executed, first takes care to get himself shaved, and handsomely dressed, either in mourning or in the dress of a bridegroom; this done, he sets his friends at work to get him leave to be buried, and to carry his coffin with him, which is easily obtained. When his suit of clothes or night-gown, his gloves, hat, periwig, nosegay, coffin, flannel-dress for his corpse, and all those things are bought and prepared, the main point is taken care of, his mind is at peace, and then he thinks of his conscience.

—H. MISSON
Memoirs and Observations of
His Travels Over England, *1719*



I was now preparing for the reception of the habit of novice, which would make me canonically a member of the Order and start me out officially on my progress towards the vows. . . . Although [Father Abbot] could hardly see us, he delivered an impassioned exhortation, telling us with deep conviction that we were making a big mistake if we came to Gethsemani expecting anything but the cross, sickness, contradictions, troubles, sorrows, humiliations, fasts, sufferings, and, in general, everything that human nature hates. Then we went up the steps to his throne one by one and he peeled off our coats (*Exuat te Dominus veterem hominem cum actibus suis . . .*) and helped by the curator and Father Master, formally clothed us in the white robes we had been wearing as oblates, together with the scapulars and cloaks of full-fledged novices of the Order.

—THOMAS MERTON
The Seven Storey Mountain, *1948*

In the age of Calvin Klein's steaming hunks, it must be hard for those under forty to realize that there was ever a time when a man was nothing but a suit of clothes, a shirt and a tie, shined leather shoes, and a gray, felt hat. If he was thought attractive, it was because he had a nice smile and a twinkle in his eye. . . . In 1947, when Marlon Brando appeared on stage in a torn sweaty T-shirt, there was an earthquake; and the male as sex object is still at . . . center stage.

—GORE VIDAL
"Tennessee Williams: Someone to Laugh at the Squares With," 1985

For clothing all wear a cloak, fastened with a clasp, or, in its absence, a thorn: they spend whole days on the hearth round the fire with no other covering. The richest men are distinguished by the wearing of under-clothes; not loose, like those of the Parthians or Sarmatians, but drawn tight, throwing each limb into relief. They wear also the skins of wild beasts . . . the hides so taken are chequered with the pied skins of the creatures native to the outer ocean and its unknown waters. The women have the same dress as the men, except that rather often trailing linen garments, striped with purple, are in use for women: the upper part of this costume does not widen into sleeves; their arms and shoulders are therefore bare, as is the adjoining portion of the chest. None the less the marriage tie with them is strict: you will find nothing in their character to praise more highly.

—TACITUS
describing Germanic folkways in
Germania, *XVII, 98 A.D.*

"Thighs—of course. But knees—never!"

—COCO CHANEL
on being asked, c. 1965, if she approved of miniskirted young women exposing their knees and thighs

Meanwhile another gentleman is making his way home in the misty dawn from some nocturnal visit. He is wearing loose violet trousers, an orange hunting-costume, so lightly coloured that one can hardly tell whether it has been dyed or not, a white robe of stiff silk and a glossy robe of beaten silk. His clothes, which have been thoroughly moistened by the dew, hang loosely about him. From the dishevelment of his side locks one can tell how negligently he must have tucked his hair into his black lacquered headdress when he got up. He wants to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

return and write his next-morning letter before the dew on the morning-glories has had time to vanish; the road seems endless, and to divert himself he hums "the sprouts in the flax fields."

—SEI SHONAGON
The Pillow Book, *c. 1000 A.D.*

I had a great mind to have spoke with the King about a business proper enough for me, about the French prize man-of-war, how he would have altered, only out of a desire to show myself mindful of business; but my linen was so dirty and my clothes mean, that I neither thought it fit for me to do that, nor go to other personas at the Court with whom I had business; which did vex me and I must remedy.

—SAMUEL PEPYS
Diary, *March 20, 1667*

They were both very fat, but Mrs. Dreyspool was enormous. It was said that she got her clothes from a couturier specializing in costumes for women who were *enceinte,* and that to pull everything in shape and get into her dresses she had to lie down on the floor. She was fond of light pastel-colored fabrics and her ensembles had the colors of pigeons, hyacinths and boudoir upholstery. Her coat covered her shoes and a wide fur piece her neck, and even in the middle of winter she wore immense garden hats that were as elaborate as wedding cakes.

—LUDWIG BEMELMANS
Hotel Splendide, *1941*

I know some women who have more heads than the devil: each day they don a new one. . . . I see some who wear them in the shape of a tripe, and some like a pancake, some like a trencher, and some like a flap, some folded up and some turned down. Oh, women, I bid you, take them off! . . . You have made a God of your head!

—SAN BERNARDINO
Prediche Volgari, *c. 1400*

You desire to know what I want that may be sent in the same manner—a piece or two of Holland Apron tape, a pair of silk mitts or Gloves, an Ell or two of Muslin or figured Lawn, and as a little of what you call frippery is very necessary towards looking like the rest of the world, Nabby would have me add, a few yards of Black or White Gauze, low priced black or white lace or a few yards of Ribbon but would have Mamma write to Pappa at the same time that she has no passion for dress further than he would approve of or to appear when she goes from home a little like those of her own age.

—ABIGAIL ADAMS
Letter to John Adams, May 1, 1780

Clothes make the poor invisible, too:—it is much easier in the U.S. to be decently dressed than it is to be decently housed, fed, or doctored. . . . It almost seems as if the affluent society has given our costumes to the poor so that they would not offend the rest of society with the sight of rags.

—MICHAEL HARRINGTON
The Other America, *1962*

The King appeared with a suit of gold lamé embroidered with gold and silver. His jewels were shaped like so many buckles and besides these, he carried a sword on which the precious stones seemed worth more than 150,000 livres. The Queen seemed covered with jewels of an extraordinary size. Because her gown was black, and its fabric used only to make these brighter, one can fairly say that they dazzled. Monsieur's costume was covered with jewels arranged like the long buttonholes of the Brandenburg coats.

—Description in Le Mercure galant *of a ball given by Louis XIV at Fontainebleau, August 1677*

We are amused at beholding the costume of Henry VIII or Queen Elizabeth, as much as if it was that of the King and Queen of the Cannibal Islands. All costume, off a man, is pitiful or grotesque. It is only the serious eye peering from, and the sincere life passed within it, which restrain laughter and consecrate the costume of any people.

—HENRY THOREAU
Walden, *1854*

I'll never forget the first Pucci that I owned . . . way out of my price range at the time, but then there never was and never will be anything like those skimpy little dresses with the Empire waists in the incredible colors. A miracle of sexiness and design. I have put away my favorite Pucci to be buried in.

—HELEN GURLEY BROWN, *1984*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

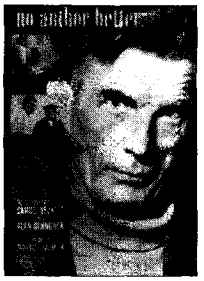
NEW FROM HARVARD

Three Seductive Ideas
JEROME KAGAN

Do the first two years of life really determine a child's future development? Are human beings only motivated by pleasure? And do people actually have stable traits, like intelligence and temperament? This book, the product of a lifetime of research by one of the founders of developmental psychology, takes on the powerful assumptions behind these questions—and proves them mistaken.

$27.50 cloth

No Author Better Served
The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider
EDITED BY MAURICE HARMON



"[These letters are] of particular interest in matters of Beckett's stagecraft and self-interpretation...[and] offer a unique overview of Beckett's stage work in the US...A well-edited set of documents that will be uniquely invaluable to students of Beckett's works and of the American theater."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

21 line illus. • $35.00 cloth

Romantic Poets, Critics, and Other Madmen
CHARLES ROSEN

"A quarter-century's worth of trenchant thinking on Romantic culture from celebrated pianist/musicologist/critic Rosen...Rosen's superb essay on the difficult but rewarding Benjamin remains quite sharp 20 years after its original publication... Especially remarkable, perhaps, is the tone of intellectual generosity that infuses Rosen's essays—as much as his Romantic avatars, he has a sure touch in uniting thought and expression to expand the worlds of his audience's experience."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

3 musical examples • $27.95 cloth

Seamus Heaney
HELEN VENDLER

Photo: Jennie Summerall

Poet and critic are well met, as one of our best writers on poetry takes up one of the world's great poets. Where other books on the Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney have dwelt chiefly on the biographical, geographical, and political aspects of his writing, this book looks squarely and deeply at Heaney's poetry as art.

$22.95 cloth

Traditions of the Bible
A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era
JAMES KUGEL

Here now is the full scholarly edition of *The Bible As It Was* (1997), expanding the author's findings into an incomparable reference work.

"Wonderfully rich and learned...Kugel's enormous undertaking is likely to be seen as a milestone in the long critical history of Bible studies."
—Richard Bernstein, *New York Times*

30 halftones • 1344 pages • $75.00 cloth

What the People Know
Freedom and the Press
RICHARD REEVES

Richard Reeves was there at the rise and at the fall of the stature of the American press, beginning as a small-town editor, becoming the chief political correspondent of the *New York Times* and then a best-selling author and award-winning documentary filmmaker. From the Pony Express to the Internet, he chronicles what happened to the press as America accelerated into uncertainty.

The Joanna Jackson Goldman Memorial Lecture on American Civilization and Government

$19.95 cloth

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
www.hup.harvard.edu
(800) 448-2242

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Remembering Alfred Kazin

I "I'm Interested in Everything!"

MORRIS DICKSTEIN

The death of Alfred Kazin not only deprives us of our greatest living man of letters, someone who wrote about literature with zest and style almost until the day he died, but also robs me of a friend I'd come to see as a kind of godfather in criticism, a polestar by which to set my literary compass. As he himself once said about Edmund Wilson, "There are deeper critics, more modest critics, critics less hidebound by indifference to abstract thought; there is no other critic who so evenly and so hauntingly writes criticism as a work of art."

Yet Kazin wrote with such fire and fluency that his example could be demoralizing. With uncanny intuition, he could evoke a writer's life and work in a well-honed phrase, an arresting metaphor. He had the reviewer's gift for not mincing words, for seizing the reader's attention. He could summon up a book so that it became the best story you ever heard, even as he brought home its limitations. His feeling for writers was personal, intimate, because he reached through to the human drama that animated their work. Describing the excitement he felt as he was working on his first book, *On Native Grounds*, as the thirties ended, he recalled: "I could read the mind behind each book. I felt connected with the text. There was some telepathy working between me and the invisible person, the omnipresent mind, that had put down these words. I was hungry for it all, hungry all the time." It was as if he could commune directly with the nineteenth-century figures whose work he was so avidly absorbing.

Other readers have felt this direct engagement with a writer's mind, but few have brought such passion to the encounter or commanded the

Morris Dickstein's new books are an edited collection of essays, *The Revival of Pragmatism*, and a forthcoming study of postwar fiction for the *Cambridge History of American Literature*. He teaches English at Queens College and the CUNY Graduate School.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vibrant language he used to describe it. Here are two examples, on Mark Twain and Ezra Pound, taken almost at random from his most wide-ranging book, *An American Procession*, which appeared in 1984:

> Mark Twain's instinct is for the sentence, the thunderclap of surprise essential to the monologist. . . . A sentence in Mark Twain, as in Frost, is above all a right sound. Hemingway, for all his homage to *Huckleberry Finn* as the initiator of modern American writing, was a rhetorician who brought an ironic and brutal simplicity to a style not "natural" like Mark Twain's but ostentatiously reduced.
>
> Pound very early extracted an extraordinary but delusional sense of authority from his ability to reproduce other men's styles. . . . He was an assimilationist of genius, a ventriloquist able to reproduce alien and ancient voices, cadences, styles—often in wilful ignorance of the actual substance. Only an American, someone perpetually dreaming "Europe" as a whole, could have performed Pound's series of metamorphoses.

Kazin's criticism, like Wilson's, is often mistaken for a softer form of belletristic appreciation. But here, on writers he doesn't wholeheartedly admire, we see how he combines spirited description with cultural history and critical judgment, deploying phrases so compressed and eruptive that they set off their own "thunderclap of surprise."

Kazin brought a tremendous emotional charge to his writing. This explains why his books touched so many general readers, and why academics, drawn to close reading and theory instead of visceral engagement with art, made relatively little use of him. Like other New York intellectuals, Kazin swam in a sea of opinion and ideological contention, but he had no "ideas," only a fiery ardor for the written word. Kazin was as much a writer as a professional critic; he poured his perceptions into travel pieces, op-ed articles, memoirs, and daily journals. He could scarcely live without crystallizing his experience into writing. His criticism, like the memoirs and journals, springs vigorously from an overflowing interest in everything around him. He wrote about books as he wrote about people, for the drama they conveyed—the comedy of motives and dreams, ambitions and self-deceptions. He saw books not as "texts" but as idiosyncratic expressions of individual minds.

Not long ago I reread *A Walker in the City*, his 1951 memoir, to try to fathom the sources of that passion for books, people, stories. "Whenever I entered the library," he says, describing the summer he was sixteen, "I would walk up and down trembling in front of the shelves. For each new book I took away, there seemed to be ten more of which I was depriving myself." Recalling his attachment to Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*, he writes, "I was so devoted that even on the day two years later Hitler came

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to power I could not entirely take it in, because on the same day John Galsworthy died." Of Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons,* he says, "I took [it] away one evening to finish on my fire escape with such a depth of satisfaction that I could never open the book again, for fear I would not recapture that first sensation." What is striking here is not only the intensity of Kazin's love of reading—and his hyperbole in evoking it—but also the setting: the public library with its inestimable treasures; the fire escape as refuge from the hot, cramped tenement flat, a private retreat for the bookish immigrant boy with a yen for distant and imaginary places.

The most unexpected thing about *A Walker in the City* is Kazin's wrenching ambivalence toward the world he sprang from: the close-knit immigrant family, the Brownsville ghetto, the working class, even the Jewish people. I had remembered it as a nostalgic book, a lyrical evocation of his early years, but this is not even half true. The smell and feel of the neighborhood are there, yes, but what came through most strongly was his parents' loneliness and hopelessness, and his determination to elude their fate. Brownsville was a place of last resort; the stigma of poverty was everywhere. "We were the end of the line," he says. "We were the children of the immigrants who had camped at the city's back door. . . . the dust of the earth to all Jews with money, and notoriously a place that measured all success by our skill in getting away from it." Kazin's parents, as he sees them, never dreamed of getting away themselves; they could escape only through their "American" children, whose education would open doors to other worlds. "It was never learning I associated with that school," he writes, "only the necessity to succeed, to get ahead of the others in the daily struggle to 'make a good impression' on our teachers." It was not enough to win favor with the teachers, who disciplined the students and corrected their speech; they had to shine. This pressure contributed to a bad stammer, the "secret ordeal" of Kazin's childhood. "Anything less than absolute perfection in school always suggested to my mind that I might fall out of the daily race, be kept back in the working class forever." Returning to the neighborhood years later, he still feels "the old foreboding that all my life would be like this."

This fear of failure, of leading a life no better than their parents' lives, was a powerful incentive to the bright kids of the ghetto. A furious hunger for experience burns in Kazin's memoirs and drives his critical writing. Besides Galsworthy and Turgenev, his reading that summer he turned sixteen included "anything about Keats and Blake," two poets whose work always spoke to the young, communicating a powerful yearning to live boldly, richly, even dangerously. In Keats this comes through as the ache of youth and sensuous expectancy, of someone eager to "burst Joy's grape against his palate fine." In Blake, whom Kazin later edited, it conveys a hatred for rigid, repressive systems of all kinds: "Those who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained." Again: "No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings." One of Blake's engravings shows a man reaching for the moon, with the caption "I want! I want!" Blake warned gnomically that "More! More! is the cry of a mistaken soul," for "less than All cannot satisfy Man." This kind of unappeasable longing would leave Kazin restless, impulsive, demanding. It would later make his relations with women tempestuous (as his memoirs show), leaving him prone to rapturous idealization and nagging discontent.

Back in Brownsville, books became Kazin's way of appeasing this hunger and surmounting the ghetto. "I read as if books would fill my every gap, legitimize my strange quest for the American past, remedy my every flaw, let me in at last into the great world that was anything just out of Brownsville." Books connected him to the nineteenth-century America that he saw in old brownstones and visual images of the city. The streets of New York, the books and paintings by Howells, Eakins, and Winslow Homer, provided his passage from Brownsville to America. The walker in the city, the spellbound wanderer in the American galleries of the Metropolitan Museum, became the most gifted explorer of our cultural past, living as much in the dim glow of the gaslight era as in the shabby present. "Dusk in America any time after the Civil War would be the corridor back and back into that old New York under my feet that always left me half-stunned with its audible cries for recognition."

Even earlier, in the neighborhood, where he felt confined to the child's world of his own city block, everything strange and different appealed to him: the parks, the vegetable gardens, even the churches. "Anything away from the block was good." The young Alfred berates his parents because their lives are mundane, because their horizons are not broad enough. In the memoir, "Beyond! Beyond!" becomes the Blakean phrase for his complaint, the talisman of his restlessness. "Alfred," he hears his exasperated father saying, "what do you want of us poor Jews?"

Kazin didn't live to complete what might have been his culminating work, a big book about the Jews, but its outlines are already there in the pages of *A Walker in the City*. Kazin never ceased to be fascinated by the enigma of the Jews—their peculiar survival, their vibrant but narrow immigrant culture, their travail in the Holocaust, their paradoxical success in America. He saw Jewish life as a community, a history, and a cultural tradition rather than a unifying faith. As a child, he recalls, "it puzzled me that no one around me seemed to take God very seriously. We neither believed nor disbelieved. He was our oldest habit." Like the family and the neighborhood, like his mother's kitchen, Judaism was something to which you were indissolubly linked—because it was in you, no matter how much you tried to get away from it. The fatalism of Brownsville, the sense of belonging to a community of outsiders, es-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sentially became his own. It conditioned his liberal politics, stimulated his implacable work ethic, and lent him a sense of ironic bemusement with the whole Jewish world. "So it was: we had always to be together: believers and non-believers, we were a people; I was of that people. Unthinkable to go one's own way, to doubt or to escape the fact that I was a Jew. . . . We had all of us lived together so long that we would not have known how to separate. . . . Was even Socialism just a happier way of keeping us together?"

As religion, Judaism meant little to him, but its tragic history, its sense of the numinous, its spirit of self-examination spoke to him deeply. Reading the catalog of sins that is always recited in the Yom Kippur service, he writes: "The voice that spoke in that prayer book seemed to come out of my very bowels. There was something grand and austere in it that confirmed everything I had felt in my bones about being a Jew: the fierce awareness of life to the depths, every day and in every hour: the commitment: the hunger." Kazin's mind was at once apocalyptic and ironic, fixed on the ultimate as well as the ordinary. This was a paradox in Jewish thinking as well. Judaism, like literature, fueled Kazin's spiritual excitement but also, because of its emphasis on habit and practice, his fascination with the obstinate dailiness of life—the very quality that made him a great reader of novels.

Though I was twenty-five years younger than Kazin, a fateful entanglement with Jews and literature created a double bond between us. I too had grown up in a self-contained Jewish ghetto. A single block on Henry Street, on the Lower East Side, with a Catholic church on one corner, a friendly pharmacist on another, an old-fashioned dairy, a dozen small tenements, and a handful of tiny synagogues, bounded my world as the block in Brownsville had encompassed his. My parents, though more Americanized and even upwardly mobile—we moved to Queens when I was nine—had the same iron sense of duty and family, the same suspicion of pleasure and self-indulgence. Despite this, my early life was very different. I had grown up during the forties, in an orthodox world built around the synagogue, the yeshiva, and the commandments, where religious observance permeated one's hours and days. Kazin found this burdensome routine too astonishing for words.

I myself was often surprised by things this self-proclaimed New York Jew didn't know about traditional Judaism. Once he asked me if there were really people who held a seder on the second night of Passover. On the other hand, he often shamed me by his spiritual interest in Judaism and his curiosity about matters I took for granted or refused to examine. For more than a year he tried with no luck to get me to read two books about Jesus that particularly intrigued him. It was obvious that Jesus—Yeshua, as he called him—would play a significant part in his new book

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about Jews, perhaps as a teacher or miracle worker, possibly as an exemplary sufferer, certainly as an individual Jew who wrestled with prophecy, tradition, and the law at a moment of terrible unrest. Yet until I read his last book, *God and the American Writer,* written with the prophetic vehemence of a lay sermon, I found it difficult to take his interest in religion seriously, since I could not see that he had any.

The religion he lays out in *God and the American Writer* is hard to distinguish from the restless, probing imagination of our greatest writers. It is a feeling for the infinite, a sense of something beyond—in Goethe's words, a "shudder of awe" before the universe. Kazin gives us a great portrait of Emily Dickinson as the descendant of New England Puritanism, "absorbing a tradition without having to obey it." Like the Jews, "she inherited with her name a religious past that was as much a part of her as being a woman. She did not believe in 'God' and His mysteries so much as she possessed them for her own purposes." Where Emerson was assured, positive, she is "openly thinking her way through." Kazin describes her as having the greatest *mind* of any American poet. "Other people had faith absolute. She had mind." Kazin identifies with her, expresses his own religious feeling through her: "She did not use poetry as prayer; she did not write to mollify God, to ward off evil; she wrote because she and she alone could find in religion the adventures of her utterly independent, endlessly speculative soul." He finds the same imaginative independence, the same intense quest, in Melville, whose "radical individualism was in the American vein and spoke for more writers than he would ever know." And further: "The American writer was so self-sufficient that if his art was entirely his own, so (if he had one) was his religion."

If Kazin's last book is a credo for a highly personal, postreligious individualism, it also insists on a sense of social responsibility rooted in an absolute feeling about good and evil. Kazin picks up the Emersonian project of rescuing conscience, humaneness, and meaningful action from the wreck of orthodoxy. Written when he himself was under the gun of illness and infirmity, the book has the testamentary quality of a final vision. Besides the great essay on Dickinson, the best chapters are devoted not to our classic authors but to Lincoln and the antislavery writers, like Harriet Beecher Stowe. "Lincoln's God was born of war," he says of the Second Inaugural Address. "God came to him through a certain exhaustion." These two chapters are written with a white-hot anger that transcends the ordinary limits of literary criticism. Composed with one eye on eternity, the other on the greatest evil in American history, Kazin's unforgiving screed encompasses not just slavery but its legacy in the contemporary world, a legacy of racial hatred, even genocide. The shadows of Auschwitz and Bosnia darken Kazin's discussion of slavery. The book's prophetic tone is far from the pithy precision, the seemingly effortless mastery of *On Native Grounds* or the aphoristic bra-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vura of *An American Procession,* certainly one of his most ambitious and beautifully written books.

Our friendship began when I reviewed *An American Procession* for *New York* magazine. Kazin's reaction to my review, like his reaction to everything, was effusive, overwhelming, and I was soon swept up into what became a fourteen-year conversation, in which I barely managed to hold my own. Before then, though we served on the same graduate faculty, we had scarcely met. Indeed, I had once alienated him when I saw a notice that he would be lecturing on Keats, *my* subject, which made me feel slightly proprietary. I sent him a note saying I was sorry I couldn't be there, but added that I didn't know Keats was a special interest of his. His reply was swift, succinct, and terrible, with every word invisibly underlined: "I'm interested in everything!" At the time, I took this as a harmless bit of bluster—Kazin was famously testy—but, as I would eventually learn, it was little more than the simple truth.

Once we got to know each other, I found his warmth, prickliness, and love of a good story irresistible. He was delighted when I told him that my son, who was then in high school, had read part of *On Native Grounds* and said, with a solemn nod, "Kazin agrees with me." There were stories I must have heard him tell half a dozen times, always with the same gusto. Conversation was part of the air he breathed, the oxygen he needed to stay alive. When he was a young man, because of his stammer, he recalled, "the word was my agony." Now there was always a book he wanted to talk about, or an item in the paper—these were the Reagan years—that made him sad or angry. He fastened on human interest stories as if they were part of an ongoing novel of daily life. The flow of his talk was so full of humor, sarcasm, vivid recollection, and quick intelligence that I arranged to interview him for CUNY-TV, the university's cable channel. It was a terrible winter day in 1985 or '86, and by the time we reached the studio at the Borough of Manhattan Community College on Chambers Street, he looked more dead than alive. I grew alarmed at his pallid face and sunken features as he slumped on the makeshift set. But when the red light went on and I asked the first question, a bolt of electricity shot through him, and he spoke incandescently for half an hour. I asked him afterward how he had done it. "Never underestimate the power of ego," he said, chuckling with pleasure.

Between "I'm interested in everything" and "the power of ego," Alfred had told me his whole story. Whenever I introduced him to an audience, I saw him give the same tireless performance, especially during the question period, when his pugnacious wit and encyclopedic knowledge of American literature came into play. (Once I joked that he ought to drop the lecture and simply take questions.) On one hand, he was a good listener, endlessly curious about people and their lives. During hospital

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stays, when most patients grow self-absorbed, he got to know a great deal about the lives of his doctors and nurses. On the other hand, he basked in the spotlight and could never resist an occasion to sound off. Even in off-the-cuff remarks, I never saw him leave an audience disappointed. He had felt unhappy, lonely, or insecure for most of his early life, so he came to trust in the power of ego as a motor of creative energy.

A couple of years ago, during a long lunch on upper Broadway, I told him how depressed I was that a great American writer, whose work I admired, had been shown to be something of a monster in his personal relationships. Alfred, whose crumbling body seemed only to sharpen his fierce mind, proceeded to improvise a brilliant lecture on how the narcissism of American writers, solitary spirits all, had fed their imaginative power. This didn't make our contemporaries more attractive human beings, but it placed their faults and strengths in the long vista of our whole cultural history.

But Alfred's own egotism hardly begins to explain what makes his work so attractive. To a remarkable degree, his ego was turned outward toward other people and their lives. This is what makes his criticism so much like storytelling, and links it closely to his wonderful memoirs and journals. He loved fiction and poetry because he relished great language but also because of the stories they told. The surrounding culture was part of the larger story, the soil from which it sprang. His 1978 book *New York Jew* is not the best of his memoirs—the tone is a little bitter and disappointed, the chronological line is blurred, his first three marriages remain too vague—but as a gallery of brilliant portraits it can hardly be matched. There they are: Edmund Wilson and Robert Frost best of all, but also his parents, Delmore Schwartz, Lionel Trilling, Hannah Arendt, Richard and Felice Hofstadter, Bernard Berenson, Saul Bellow. When he first wrote about Bellow—they were born ten days apart—the novelist was taken aback. "I thought I controlled the picture gallery," Bellow told him. He never forgave Kazin for writing so well about him.

Kazin's first book made him famous early: as a result, he knew everyone, took everything in, and kept a daily journal that helped make his memories vivid and concrete. I enjoyed being with him partly for the tales he told—about life in the fifties, for example, or about being in England during the war, in Germany only a few years afterward, in Russia at the end of the fifties. When I was invited to a conference in Berlin in the late eighties, he urged me to overcome my misgivings about going to Germany. "You're interested in history," he said. "See it with your own eyes." For me he was a living link to people long gone, to a world I knew mainly from books. Exactly the same curiosity drew him to much younger people: he was interested in the decades to come, the ones he would never see.

Remarkably, Kazin at eighty-two was as hungry for life as he had been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as a boy in Brownsville, or a young writer devouring nineteenth-century novels in the reading room of the New York Public Library. In old age he still reviewed new books—usually a young person's game—took them in and dashed off his pieces with an alacrity that amazed me. His last reviews—on I. B. Singer, for example—were as searching as any he'd ever written. His sense of humor remained sharp, even though, as he once said, he felt that a large brick wall was looming up before him. "Start writing the eulogy," he would tell me jokingly, whenever some new illness threatened. His fourth marriage, to the writer Judith Dunford, must have mellowed him, for he could deflate with humor matters that had once embittered him. When an admiring reader approached him in Fairway, the West Side's fruit and vegetable emporium, and asked, "Would I be speaking to my favorite literary critic?" he answered puckishly, "Lionel Trilling?"

As Isaiah Berlin once wrote, "To know—to enjoy the friendship of—a great man must permanently transform one's ideas of what human beings can be or do." It was more than a feat of longevity and endurance that he published two masterful studies of American literature fifty-five years apart, and lived a full life in between. Alfred Kazin's achievement was to react to everything, to keep alive his feeling for people, places, and books from his boyhood in Brownsville, dreaming of "beyond," to his unforgiving old age, still eager for what the next day, the next book, the next conversation would bring. One of his last books, culled from his journals, he called *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment,* borrowing a line from T. S. Eliot.

In the hospital the week before he died, he was reading a Vietnam memoir, drawn by the human interest but also determined to get the exact chronology of the war straight. As a prerogative of the elderly, he could be gruff, overbearing, curmudgeonly. He sometimes behaved like a diva, sucking up all the air in the room, yet I admired the way he always said exactly what he thought. A born teacher, he would sometimes lash out at his students if they fell short of his hopes, but he could also overwhelm them with tender concern. Alfred befriended younger colleagues not as acolytes but as different minds. He had the temperament of a traveler, an adventurer, and the great writers were the stars by which he navigated. He honored their company with his unquenchable vitality, insight, and eloquence. Now he himself belongs to American literature. He came a long way from Brownsville but, to his credit, he never entirely left it behind.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

II The Burning Soul

MICHAEL KAZIN

I have been talking about my father all my life: his awkwardness with young children, his limitless passion for words, his rages (sensible and not so sensible), his fierce love of justice, his luminous hatred for pretense and pomposity, his growing fame. All this has infuriated, challenged, instructed, and bemused me—and I know it will keep doing so for the rest of my life.

Like all Jewish intellectuals, my father loved to fight about ideas, and he and I did a lot of that. What mattered to him, though, was not so much the position I took as the sensibility from which I spoke. He knew when I really believed what I was saying and when I was arguing in order to convince myself. I think he often knew my mind better than I did. And when he was wrong, he was gloriously mistaken.

But he was right about most of the important things—and would tell me so, again and again, with a roaring eloquence that continued to stun me no matter how often I encountered it. In the last letter he wrote me, responding to an essay I had written on the difficulties of the labor movement, he returned to one of the ancient passions, the politics of class:

> Unions! I used to laugh when your grandfather received a letter from the Painters Union beginning "Dear Sir and Brother." The head of the union was known familiarly, even in his family, as "Jake the Bum." His henchmen put a gun on the ballot box when the timid Jews like Charley Kazin went up to vote.
>
> But don't get me wrong. I thank God I grew up poor and read on the wall of the Brownsville Labor Lyceum the saying of one Eugene

Michael Kazin is a historian who teaches at American University in Washington, D.C. His most recent book is *The Populist Persuasion: An American History.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Victor Debs—"So long as there is a working class, I am of it. So long as there is a soul in prison, I am not free." They just don't think like that today. Gene had that in his soul, where all understanding begins.

Others are and will be better judges than I of what my father wrote and its place in the history of literature and criticism. For me, he was the burning soul who taught me that sensing the world through language was painful, inescapable, and, far too rarely, sublime. I learned from him and loved him more than he understood—and that regret haunted me as I read his obituaries and haunts me as I write these words. Writing wasn't everything for my father, but I am content that his words go on.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

III Alfred Kazin's Tie

JONATHAN ROSEN

One of Alfred Kazin's ties is in my closet. It was given to me the night that Alfred died. His wife, Judith, came out of the bedroom with ties hanging like vines from her hand. "Take one," she urged.

There were some old woolen ties there, narrow and square-bottomed, that I imagined might have been worn when the *Partisan Review* was in its heyday. Ties that had had lunch with Edmund Wilson or cocktails with Lionel and Diana Trilling. Ties that had been to parties with Mary McCarthy and Sidney Hook and Clement Greenberg and Saul Bellow. Ties that had been worn to the great reading room of the Forty-second Street library, where Alfred wrote *On Native Grounds,* or to the Eichmann trial, which he covered for *The New Republic* in the sixties.

It wasn't easy to choose. For one thing, Alfred was still alive. He was lying on a hospital bed in the middle of the book-lined living room, where a makeshift hospice had been set up. He was getting glucose and morphine. He was no longer conscious, though his physical presence was intensified terribly by his dying. He would still occasionally say something aloud. Everyone in the room had the anxious expectation that there might at least be a few more words. Whenever he spoke, a family member rushed to his bedside.

I had come with the hope of saying good-bye to Alfred, though I realized when I got there that it would be for my own sake that I spoke to him; he had already passed into some other realm. I wished most of all to thank him. Nearly fifty years older than I, he'd been an inspiring presence in my life for as long as books had mattered to me—first as a

Jonathan Rosen is the cultural editor of the *Forward.* His novel, *Eve's Apple,* was recently published in paperback by Plume. He contributed "The Talmud and the Internet" to the Spring 1998 issue of the SCHOLAR.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

magical name on my parents' bookshelf, then as a voice of literary illumination, finally as a friend. Long before I met him, when I was still a student in junior high school, he had made me feel that reading was anything but a cloistered act of alienation. It was an act of liberation—for the mind and for the body, for the imagination and for the soul, for the individual if not for the world, though ideally for both. Reading Kazin, I never felt I was stepping out of life but stepping more fully into it.

I remember being a disheartened graduate student in English literature and stumbling upon a copy of *The Bright Book of Life,* Alfred's study of the modern novel. It is not one of his major works, but the title alone, which comes from D. H. Lawrence, inspired me. For days I went around chanting to myself: *the bright book of life, the bright book of life.* If a book wasn't that, what was the point? The essays in that single volume meant more to me than the work of the literary theorists I was in those days obliged to read. Later that year, I dropped out of graduate school.

It was extraordinarily moving to see Alfred lying on a hospital bed surrounded by people who loved him and by a lifetime's library. The books around him—cheap paperbacks and dignified old Modern Library editions jumbled together—seemed, that night, peculiarly inert. There is nothing like the presence of a dying man to challenge the authority of books on shelves. Did Emerson and Hawthorne and Lawrence and Blake and James and Howells have something to say to this moment? Or would Alfred, if he had been able to open his eyes, have looked at his bookshelf the way Artur Sammler looked at his in Bellow's novel, and thought, "The wrong books, the wrong papers"? And what would the right ones have been? Would they have been Alfred's own books? Would they have been books not yet written? Is the failure of words that comes with death a failure that spreads to the books in the room, the way clocks are rumored to stop when someone dies?

Kazin's own work grappled in some unspoken way with this question. He thought with his whole body. He wasn't simply a reader but, in his own definition, a "walker." In *The Open Street,* an early version of *A Walker in the City* that was published in 1948, Kazin wrote: "I need to walk in these streets as I need to pray and to dance; somehow it is only when I walk alone that I feel the possibility of doing either." *The Open Street* ends with a final fusion of body and soul, being and imagination, that is mystical in its longing but grounded in the physical rhythms of a body alive:

> Walking I am unbound, and find that precious unity of life and imagination, that silent outgoing of self, which is so easy to lose, but which at high moments seems to start up again from the deepest rhythms of my own body. How often have I had this longing for an infinite walk—of going on and on, forever unimpeded, until the movement of my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> body as I walked fell into the flight of streets under my feet—until I in my body and the world in its skin of earth were blended into a single act of knowing.

Alfred was fascinated by the "precious unity" that binds the lived world to the written world. He understood that life itself is an awkward alliance of words and the physical, history-bound creatures that produce them.

His criticism is in part predicated on a belief that, over time, a novel or a poem becomes unglued from the historical and cultural world that produced it and that unless it can be grafted back onto the body of history, it is only half alive. He did much more than that, fashioning out of the progression of American literature a thrilling narrative, a sort of novel of American culture whose heroes are its writers. On the other hand, he was keenly attuned to the peculiar character of an individual piece of writing and to the singular, transcendent "I" that had breathed the work into being. He admired the self as well as the whole societal union of selves, which may explain his own divided output: half his books are works of literary criticism and half are memoirs.

Alfred embodied a tension that is in many ways particularly American—the urge to assert individual freedom while acknowledging the claims of the larger culture. He once wrote me a letter at the *Forward,* speaking with great reverence for the "universalizing idealism of the Jewish labor movement in which I grew up many moons ago." Nevertheless, it was that immigrant world of Brownsville that he fled, running across the Brooklyn Bridge as fast as he could go toward the secular city that would allow him to make his name and his fortune. Once on the other side, however, he found himself further torn. American literature beckoned, but so did the impulse to look back at the world that had produced him. I am glad that he never smothered one urge at the expense of the other—that he wrote *New York Jew* as well as *An American Procession.*

Looking at Alfred's ties hanging lovingly from his wife's hand, I had a sense of how impossible it is ever to reconstitute a writer's world, a writer's life. We have to settle, after death, for fragments. I would like to say that I made some ideal, symbolic choice, but I saw my hand reach for a red silk tie with tiny white diamonds on it, the width contemporary, the fabric fresh. It was a tie I might actually wear. Out in the hall, I read the label and discovered it was from Barneys. A frivolous choice, I told myself, but then, ties are frivolous to begin with and cannot be expected to do the work of the people they once adorned. I went home and reread *A Walker in the City.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IV Listening to the Sea

SEAN WILENTZ

As a critic, Alfred Kazin was impossible to place in any of the conventional categories. He owed allegiance to none of the intellectual factions that rose and fell (and sometimes rose again, under different names) during his long career. He read closely, but was not a close reader in the New Critic style. He was deeply historical, but was too absorbed by the play of language and by the individual mind and voice to be either an old-style or new-style historicist. He was endlessly interested in the diagnosticians of the modern condition, not least Sigmund Freud, who became posthumous gurus to entire schools of literary critics—but his skepticism of schools and gurus, his phobia of being buried in dogma, kept any of those interests from reaching the level of an enthusiasm, let alone a discipleship.

An admixture of a man, curiously combining aggressiveness and shyness (as the novelist Brian Morton's character Leonard Schiller observes in *Starting Out in the Evening*), Alfred was too aroused and too ambitious to keep his voice down. At times, let it be said, that voice was grumpy and brusque. But Alfred was also too meditative, too provoked by his bafflements, to lay down a literary line. Philosophically, he distrusted systems but forever lived in hope. He was an optimistic nominalist with attitude—which is one reason, I suppose, why he was so affected by American writers and writing.

These traits of Alfred's shine with special luster in one of my favorites of his literary essays, first published in 1956 as the introduction to the Riverside edition of *Moby-Dick*. The essay begins with an uncontroversial but eloquent pronouncement to the effect that *Moby-Dick* is a peculiarly full and rich book whose style is "remarkably easy, natural and 'Ameri-

Sean Wilentz is Dayton-Stockton Professor of History and Director of the Program in American Studies at Princeton University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can,' yet always literary, and which swells in power until it takes on some of the roaring and uncontainable rhythms with which Melville describes the sea." Then, more interestingly, Kazin approaches the book in a way that many of us (myself included) have imitated ever since, by comparing and contrasting Ishmael the dreamy explorer with Ahab the forceful tyrant: two opposed modes of modern consciousness.

As ever, Kazin places his readings within their proper historical and cultural contexts. ("In Melville," he writes, "the Protestant habit of moralizing and the transcendental passion of symbolizing all things as examples of 'higher laws' combined to make a mind that instinctively brought an inner significance to each episode.") But there is also something transhistorical and, I think, personal in his discussion of Ishmael, whose mind "consciously extends itself to get behind the world of appearances," but who cannot quite come to any conclusions, and of Ahab, the intellectual aristocrat and dictator. "Ahab's drive is to prove, not to discover," he writes; "the world that tortures Ishmael by its horrid vacancy has tempted Ahab into thinking that he can make it over." And while Kazin is obviously drawn to Ishmael, who was not just an observer but a critical participant in the story, he also insists that autocratic Ahab is not just a fanatic but an American hero, "a hero of thought who is trying, by terrible force, to reassert man's place in nature," and who declares "in the very teeth of a seemingly hostile and malevolent creation, that man's voice is heard for something against the watery waste and the deep, that man's thought has an echo in the universe." An instinctual Ishmael, Kazin is in awe of Ahab.

But that's not all: the essay takes a brilliant turn when Kazin notices how Melville is able to portray man's struggle with nature "from the side of nature itself"—"nature" here meaning the whole external show and force of animate life in a world emptied of God. "[Melville] sees the whale's view of things far more than he does Ahab's," Kazin notes, "and Moby-Dick's milk-white body, the tailfeathers of the seabirds streaming from his back like pennons, are described with a rapture that is like the adoration of a god." Melville's ability to side with nature rather than with man, to put his ear to the rock rather than to the hero trying to get his sword *out* of the rock, leads him, by Kazin's telling, to heap detail upon detail in an "awesomeness of power against which Ahab's challenge is utterly vain." Melville, he writes, "has no doubt that man is puny and presumptuous and easily overwhelmed—in short, drowned—in the great storm of reality he tries to encompass."

And yet—here is Kazin's wonderful final twist, which he has saved for the essay's final paragraph—all is not lost. "For though Melville," he writes, "takes a grim, almost cruel pleasure in showing man tumbling over before the magnitude of the universe," his novel, his very attempt to write that novel, cedes to man the poetic power of transcription that will

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

admit human beings into nature's tremendous scale. Man, in other words, can imagine and can write, and for Kazin's Melville, as for Kazin himself, that is what really matters.

Kazin concludes:

> Man is not merely a waif in the world; he is an ear listening to the sea that almost drowns him; an imagination, a mind, that hears the sea in the shell, and darts behind all appearance to the beginnings of things, and runs riot with the frightful force of the sea itself. There, in man's incredible and unresting mind, is the fantastic gift with which we enter into what is not our own, what is even against us—and for this, so amazingly, we can speak.

Alfred's gifts were truly fantastic, his mind incredible and unresting. He entered into what was not supposed to be his own, American literature, and spoke of it amazingly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

V My Fellow American

ANTONIO DAJER

I had never heard of Alfred Kazin (imagine!) until three years ago, on a flight from Paris to New York. The cabin doors were swinging shut when a woman in her late fifties homed in on the empty seat—and potential nap space—beside me. I grabbed my sheaf of medical journals. I live in Paris, but commute to New York to pull emergency room shifts every month. Plane time is for journals. My seatmate eyed my review article.

"Pulmonary embolism?" she asked. "I had that once." And from there, Judith Dunford and I moved on to Chekhov—he was a physician, so people always assume I have a special bond with him—and from Chekhov, somehow, to Harvard, where I had been a premed English major.

"Then you might know my husband, Alfred Kazin. He taught there."

I confessed that I'd managed to get my diploma without paying much attention to details like faculty members. Judith not only forgave this mortifying lapse but resolved to remedy it by inviting me to lunch.

We set a date at Alfred's club, the Century—for me, virgin territory. Alfred and I got there first.

"Dottore!" he exclaimed in greeting. He had just turned eighty, but he lavished such deference on me that I felt I was the venerable one.

"You must love Chekhov," he said. His eyebrows lifted.

"Actually, Chekhov never did much for me . . ."

He cocked his head like a stymied puppy.

"I must try him again," I mumbled.

He smiled, took back his offering unoffended, and rose to greet Judith.

After lunch, I had an airport bus to catch. They insisted on walking me to Grand Central. Alfred hoisted my suitcase.

Antonio Dajer is an emergency room physician. He writes regularly for *Discover* magazine.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's fine," I stammered. "I've got it."

"Not at all, my boy, not at all."

Stately, barely listing, my leaden case firmly in hand, Alfred Kazin marched to Grand Central.

Every time I returned to New York after that first meeting, Alfred gave me one of his books. The first was *A Walker in the City,* with his mother at its heart, setting down her endless sewing, looking out the kitchen window as the setting sun touched their Brownsville street and crying, "Look, Alfred, how beautiful!" Next came *Writing Was Everything,* where Albert Camus, in the springtime of a liberated Paris, spoke of his love for Faulkner "because I too am a Southerner."

And whenever I was in town, I talked with Alfred about books. I had grown up with Eliot, Tolstoy, and García Marquez. Alfred championed Americans: Faulkner, Crane, Melville, Dickinson. Two of my grandparents were born in Lebanon, a third in Nicaragua. This son of shtetl Jews and I opened the family album of our shared American legacy and explored it together. He often mentioned Abraham Lincoln. "If Lincoln's vision hadn't been preserved," he once said, as wide-eyed as if the close call had happened only a minute before, "where would our ancestors have gone?"

And so it went until a call came from Judith, telling me that Alfred had broken his hip. There was an appalling string of complications. I met Judith in the hospital solarium. She pushed more books into my hands.

"What do you think, *Dottore?*"

What I thought was that old age comes in a rush, not gradually, not gracefully—but that so far everything was treatable. The complications folded their tents. When I saw Alfred next, he gave me the news that his latest book, *God and the American Writer,* had been nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award. Moving cost him dearly now, but there was still too much left to write.

A few months later, a cancerous growth on his right big toe had to be excised. I told him I'd check on it during my next visit to see how it was healing.

"Dottore," Alfred marveled, "a house call!" He clambered onto his bed and stuck out the aggrieved toe. "Watch, dear, watch how he does it." This to Judith, who was spectacularly capable of caring for him in all respects. But what was the point of any gesture, if not to make it memorable?

Our last outing was to the Jewish Museum, to see the exhibit on Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee exhibit. I mentioned that when I was in ninth grade in Puerto Rico, my teacher had accused me of cheating when I correctly answered what Hitler's surname would have been if his father hadn't changed it: Schicklgruber. This delighted Alfred. But I had never heard of the American journalist Varian Fry or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

how he had saved Marc Chagall and André Breton, among many others, from the Nazis.

"Ah, Varian!" Alfred exclaimed. He left his three-wheeled walker at the door and shuffled slowly through the exhibit, but with every step (to use a phrase from Rilke that he quoted in *Writing Was Everything*) he made the past break out in my heart. He had known Fry, of course. And in *The New Republic,* in 1943, he had tried to amplify Fry's desperate warnings about Europe's Jews.

"All of three people wrote to say how concerned they were," he said. "Poor Varian. He died too early, and forgotten."

The next time I visited, Alfred could not walk, only sit. Worsening back pain turned out to be a metastasis of long-dormant prostate cancer. He told me that all he wanted was enough time to finish his last book. The title was *Jews.* It would begin with his grandfather, dead in his twenties and buried in a pauper's grave.

I explained that the radiation therapy would knock him flat for a while and then, with luck, grant him time for the book. But I was wrong. In the hospital for the last time, as toxins fogged his brain, he would cry out to Judith, "They're hurting me!" But then his mind would burn through. The last time I heard him laugh, he was talking, with perfect clarity, about C. P. Snow.

Two weeks later he lay in his apartment, dying. His breaths came dry and raspy—the last driving automaticity of the body, so stark without the voice. I touched his arm.

"Alfred, hello," I said, not expecting an answer.

Without opening his eyes, he said from far away, in the last sentence he spoke, "Look who's here."

A friend, I thought, whose world you made utterly new.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VI Notes from Mrs. K.

JUDITH DUNFORD

I first "met" Alfred Kazin about twenty years before he met me. A senior at Mount Holyoke, I had read him for years in the *Reporter* and everywhere else and was sitting right in the front row, pupils fully dilated, when he came over from nearby Smith College in the spring of 1954 to lecture. At the time I was wistfully synthetic, a working-class Jewish scholarship student from the Bronx desperate to take on the coloration of my WASP classmates. More than anything else, I longed to be able to say "aw-runge juice"—with conviction—like a Midwesterner.

There was a line from a Rilke poem that Alfred loved and always quoted: "You must change your life." After this lecture by a bona fide New York intellectual, my life was changed, utterly, as though the poem had rolled up its sleeves and set to work on me. I tore back across the dark campus, badly skinning my nose on a tree along the way, and burst into my dormitory, shouting: "I have just heard the most brilliant man! I want my New York accent back!"

Nothing from the time we finally met face to face in the late seventies until he died last June ever changed my mind or lessened my excitement. Living with Alfred was heady. He streamed with ideas day and night, weekdays and weekends and holidays. I came to picture his mind as a huge pinball machine in which he ricocheted from one amazing insight to another, ringing bells and setting all the "winner" lights ablaze.

Which is not to say that we didn't spend as much time as any other married couple in our version of Tristram Shandy's mother's famous query, "Pray, my dear, did you remember to take out the garbage?" I often found myself smiling wryly when friends would ask me, a little breathlessly, if Alfred and I started our mornings with Montesquieu over

Judith Dunford is a writer and reviewer who lives in New York City.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

our scrambled eggs and moved through the day to Proust, Emerson, and Macaulay. "Well," I'd say, "yes and no."

The garbage—down the compactor chute—was something Alfred could actually handle without ambiguity. Otherwise, in practical matters he was central casting's dream of Absent-minded Professor as Schlemiel. I have always believed that the same uncanny powers of association that made him such a profound reactor to writing were precisely what defeated him around the house. There, by and large, it pays to think in a straight line. The writing he reacted to profoundly did not include instruction manuals for the toaster oven, the answering machine, or the VCR. These he never read at all, believing that there were people born knowing what was in them, and that these people should be called upon if needed. He seemed to have faith in me as the family Mr. Goodwrench. My running joke with him was, "Alfred, the world has acknowledged you as a great literary critic and a very great reader. But there is one sentence you have never mastered: OPEN OTHER END."

He was nearly the last writer we knew to switch to an electric typewriter. There were always three or four around, as they tended to break down under his ferocious assaults. Then, a few years ago, when they all seemed to have breathed their last, he made the big leap to a computer. We were both terrified—my knees knocked audibly at the idea of teaching him SAVE—but the transition was surprisingly easy. We kept the hacking on a strictly need-to-know level, just enough so he could type, correct, and print with reasonable (though not invariable) predictability.

Days usually started with his journal entries, something he'd kept up since he was a teenager. There he noted or elaborated on his thoughts, worked out ideas, whined (though less as the years passed), exulted, and attacked. The journal was a hugely useful resource for his books and pieces, but it also served the purpose of oiling the wheels to get him started in the morning.

No day satisfied him unless he could work. Whenever we took a vacation, I could predict with absolute accuracy that at some point during Day Five Alfred would start to twitch, desperate to get to his desk, and would wonder aloud, with feigned innocence, if we could change our tickets, cancel our reservations, and leave early. Once we were back home, we fell into an agreeable rhythm. He would work happily, squashed with his clunky old PC into a corner of our tiny, cluttered apartment, the sun fighting through the dusty windows to warm his back. We had our own afternoon vaudeville routine: "Are you tired?" I would always ask. "Pleasantly," he would always answer.

My brother, as smitten as I was, admiringly called Alfred "the boy who loves books." "Boy" was the operative word as much as "books" was. No one I knew was ever possessed by a more rapturous sense of possibility each time he opened a book, nor was anyone more convinced (and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

convincing) that literature *mattered,* terribly. That rapture, that certainty, never frayed or dented or rusted, even as Alfred grew old and shockingly frail. He sparked and sparkled, undiminished and unfatigued, until the last bout of cancer and radiation finally wore him out. Long after we could no longer dance together to the kitchen radio, his incomparable responses to what he'd been reading kept excitedly coming, as though *they* were dancing. When Alfred talked, he remained as exhilarated and buoyant as he must have been as a kid after he read his favorite book, *The Count of Monte Cristo,* for the first time. I felt as though I had married into some remarkable religion and were witnessing its triumphant power over death.

Certainly I never stopped gasping at his fearlessness. Someone once called him Great Soothsayer. I think that was fair. His fierceness could be alarming to me, since my nature has always been to smooth over, placate, find the middle ground—what Alfred (contemptuously) called "making nice." *He* was a flamethrower. He could easily be defined by the enemies he made, and there were many, a perfect parade of people who had committed Deadly Intellectual and Political Sins. Unlike droves of his contemporaries, Alfred never knuckled under to easy ideology or elder-statesman rocking-chair disengagement. In politics he was often hotly "against" when being "for" would have been easier and would probably have made life silkier.

I like to think of one of the earlier times when I nearly lost him, which happened at least twice before the final knockout punch. It was in the eighties. He'd had a heart attack and was about to have bypass surgery. Neither of us was sure we'd ever say hello again. Heavily sedated, he was being wheeled to the operating room on a gurney. I was running along next to him, clutching the sad parcel of "personal possessions" one takes home at such times—the wallet, the watch, the shaver. And Alfred? Through the sedative, his voice a little dog-eared from the drugs, Alfred was telling me about the importance of Lincoln as a national myth. And I thought, "If I never see him again, this is exactly the way I want to remember him."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Perennial

WENDY BARKER

We are alone in your car driving across
northern California hills greener than
any I have seen outside of England, yet
we aren't even talking about the green

swimming beyond the windshield, we are
talking of Italy, our love affair
with the Tuscan hills, brown and gold
hills with their spiraling vines,

grapes, and swallows over the olives
shading the red dirt as we sweep
across these green spring hills where
you live with your wife and babies,

you I would have loved if life
had just twisted in another direction,
the way the alley off the main piazza
in Pisa, where you lived the first

year you were married, turned a certain
way, so you learned to find the market
with the open stalls where they sold
the lemon yellow peppers you loved,

the sweet lemon peppers you ate
that year you lived in Pisa. How
you relished them plain, sliced,
whole, steamed, raw, in salads.

The car twists and we crest over
another hill different from the one
back a way and yet the same green.
I loved you once. But never did.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

All those years commuting together
and we never touched. Until the night
before I was to move away, with friends
around us in the restaurant, you pressed

your mouth on mine so the shape of
my mouth after that was never the same.
And I loved my long-time husband,
and your wife now is, I know, much

better for you than I could have been,
than you would have been for me.
These hills, so many, almost alike,
green after green. Maybe one summer

we'll meet in Italy, maybe we'll rent
a farmhouse with room for our children.
When I go home to my husband, how
can I fit these greens into our car?

I left a winter overcast sky, gray mud.
But now, after flying back, and
driving home, everything here too
as far as I can see has turned green—

lime, moth, juniper, cypress, mesquite
foaming lace over the grasses so soft,
moist, I want to lie down in the field.
And as we talk of the mail that came

while I've been gone, the native sweet
acacia, huisachillo, blooms a sudden
start by the road, gold as the little
Tuscan peppers, sweet, crunch, home.

Wendy Barker is a Professor of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her most recent collection of poems is *Eve Remembers.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Another Christmas

DONALD HALL

Our first Christmas together
at Eagle Pond I bought
a chain saw to cut the tree
from our woodlot. Puffing
with accomplishment I set
an emaciated hemlock kitty-
corner from the Glenwood.

"What will become of Perkins?"
Jane asked when she could still
speak. Two years later
I miss her teasing voice
that razzed my grandiloquence.
"Perkins, dim your lights."
"Somebody cover Perkins's cage."

All year I could do anything
I wanted, any time of day
or night, travel anywhere, buy
anything. Therefore I sat
in my blue chair doing nothing
and trying to feel nothing.
On this second Christmas

I fix, decorate, and cherish
a visible vacancy kitty-
corner from the Glenwood.
Sometimes I dream awake.
Sometimes I see her face
in its strong-featured beauty
with her eyes full of pity.

Donald Hall's twelfth book of poems, *Without*, is a series about the illness and death of his wife, Jane Kenyon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ghana, 1963

A Memoir

DAVID LEVERING LEWIS

When the Ghana Airways jet lifted off from Heathrow direct to Accra at the end of September 1963, what I knew about sub-Saharan Africa consisted mostly of attentive gleanings from the *Observer* and the *Guardian* and a rather desultory acquaintance with *Présence Africaine,* along with a bouillabaisse of factoids from Lord Hailey, profiles in caricature of Lugard and Smuts, Kenyatta and Azikiwe, lurid accounts of Lumumba and the Mau Mau, tangy anthropology about Pygmies and Tutsis and Leakeys, and the fiction of Joseph Conrad and Graham Greene. About Francophone North Africa, I could pretend to know a good deal more, thanks to almost two years of dissertation-related comings and goings to France from London in the midst of the Algerian War that was then being fought out between the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) and French security forces on the streets of Paris.

As I boarded my flight, I counted on the slight social advantage that several friendships strategically struck up with Ghanaians at the University of London were likely to give me over most arriving expatriates. Two of those friendships seemed especially propitious. Adu Boahen, an Ashanti nobleman and delightful fellow member of London's Goats Club, would shortly surprise me in his new distinction as chair of the history department in the new national University of Ghana at Legon. Twenty years later, Boahen, then West Africa's outstanding historian, would edit the seventh volume of UNESCO's *General History of Africa.* The

David Levering Lewis, the Martin Luther King, Jr., University Professor at Rutgers, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race.* His other books include *The Race to Fashoda: European Colonialism and African Resistance in the Scramble for Africa.* He is a member of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR's editorial board.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ebullient John Fynn, a future minister of education who remained in London completing his doctorate, provided me with introductions to members of his powerful family, whose newspaper and interlocking businesses had significantly advanced the political career of the young Kwame Nkrumah. The letter from the outgoing chairman of the department of history had been bubbly in its British welcome to Legon. As the official date of my discharge from military service was slated for the first week of October 1963, Professor G. W. Irwin rightly feared that the short, hectic interim between the flight from Europe to West Africa and the first week of duties as a lecturer in history would prove much too disorienting. He would be quite pleased to write to my commanding officer at the U.S. Army's Second General Hospital in Landstuhl, Germany, to press for an early release from my duties as a psychiatric technician.

Defending a dissertation on left-wing French Catholic intellectuals during the inter-war years had earned me, all in one memorable March week in 1962, a doctorate from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in European history and a notice from my Atlanta draft board to report immediately for induction into the United States Army. The "neighbors" (a quaint draft-board formality) who sent greetings in those days at the end of the Jim Crow era were, down South, always white and invariably inclined to terminate capriciously the student status of black prospective inductees. The Atlanta board had acted none too soon in my case—another two months and I would have aged out of its clutches on my twenty-sixth birthday. Twelve months later, I was in Europe as a private attached to a medical battalion in comparison to which the fictive MASH would have seemed a model of Prussian efficiency. This was also, reputedly, the only United States military unit with standing orders to retreat in time of war, as it was supposed to evaluate battle-disoriented cadres. In record time, I managed to engineer an early release from the army, using an escape clause applying to college teachers in certain special circumstances. Going to teach in the second African country to win independence patently met the test. To Professor Irwin at Legon, anxiously waiting to hear when I would come and what courses I would teach, I signaled a late-September arrival and an agreement to offer the suggested course in British and European History, 1200–1500, along with an honors offering described by the university catalogue as an introduction to political thought ranging from St. Augustine's *City of God* through Rousseau's *Social Contract* to Marx's *Communist Manifesto.*

By the time my adventure began, the old Gold Coast had become a tightly run one-party state under its modernizing, American-educated leader, Kwame Nkrumah, who had risen from prime minister to president after a 1960 referendum that transformed Ghana into a republic. With some three hundred million pounds sterling having been trans-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ferred to its accounts by the departing British, this wealthy, comparatively literate country of seven million had espoused through the charismatic Osagyefo ("Redeemer") Dr. Kwame Nkrumah a national destiny of stupendous proportions—the creation of a United States of Africa. Ghana had loaned Sékou Touré's Guinea some thirty million desperately needed dollars after the huffily departing French crated the telephones—and even the ballpoint pens—in order to punish the new nation for daring to reject General De Gaulle's offer of membership in the Communauté Française. More than that, in December 1960, the two countries announced the formation of a political association with a third partner, the new West African nation of Mali, all of whom pledged their support of Lumumba's Congo and of Ahmed Ben Bella's FLN.

The word had gone forth from Flagstaff House, the Ghanaian White House, that people of African descent abroad were welcome to bring their talents to help transform a well-intentioned dictatorship into the lodestar of Black Africa. To no group was the summons more exhilarating than to the African American professional class of educators, lawyers, physicians, journalists, and diplomaed adventurers—the grandsons and granddaughters of W. E. B. Du Bois's so-called Talented Tenth. The son of a president of a historically black college who had worked his way through Yale and the University of Chicago, I was one of many pilgrims in a cultural hegira that brought scores of serenely ill-informed enthusiasts to Accra, the Pan-African Mecca, from Harlem, Atlanta, Chicago, Berkeley, and other American elsewheres.

Indeed, the very symbols and monuments of the Ghanaian state were contrived for deep resonance in what a later generation would come to call the Diaspora: the national tricolor of red, gold, and green centered by a black star, evoking memories of Marcus Garvey's fabulous back-to-Africa maritime gamble; Black Star Square, the vast public space where Nkrumah received the crisp salute of soldiers battle-tested in Lumumba's Congo (unlike the make-believe legions that had once defiled before Garvey in Madison Square Garden); the African Research Centre, a brick and glass structure in Bauhaus style named for irrepressible George Padmore, principal organizer of the catalytic Fourth Pan-African Congress and Nkrumah's deceased West Indian contemporary and mentor. Above all, there was the consummate synthesis of all that African destiny and unity portended in the myth-building presence in Ghana of the Grand Old Man of Pan-Africanism, the senior intellectual of the race, Du Bois himself, dead at ninety-five less than three months before my arrival. Because Du Bois's end had precisely coincided with the historic March on Washington on August 23, the uncanny appropriateness of his exit produced a momentary pause in that day's momentous program when the news was announced from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The author of *The Souls of Black Folk,* co-founder of the National Association

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the Advancement of Colored People, organizer of the First Pan-African Congress, and embattled Marxist expatriate had been laid to rest in Accra with magnificent pageantry in a bronze sarcophagus wrapped in a flag inspired by Garvey. Looking back, I cannot pretend that my reflections upon Du Bois's momentous exit had, at that time, any of the portentousness that might have been appropriate for one of his future biographers.

For those African Americans impatient with sit-ins, freedom-bus rides, Albany, Georgia, and Bull Connor's Birmingham, the pull of Ghana in 1963 could be irresistible. Some of us looked upon a citizenship struggle fought at the level of lunch counters and bus seats as a phase of mandated absurdity to be left to singing parishioners and valiant children. Ours were far more revolutionary conceits, variously inspired by Marx and Mao, Che Guevara and Robert Williams (a now-forgotten renegade NAACP official) but possessing the common denominator of affronted alienation. As one of America's oldest peoples, we were demeaned by having to petition for our constitutionally guaranteed rights. It was therefore a hypnotic conception that black people were building a militant black republic destined, it seemed, to jump-start the liberation of Azania (South Africa) and to spearhead the unification of the continent—and thus a considerably more interesting prospect than civil rights duty in Alabama or Mississippi.

At long last, then, after more than a century of ignominious Haitian and Liberian false starts, a conjunction of place, time, and race existed in which to fulfill the black nationalist ideals of Martin Delany, Alexander Crummell, Theodore Holly, Edward Blyden, Du Bois, and Garvey. True, not everyone visaed for Ghana that year had read Du Bois's *Worlds of Color,* Padmore's *Gold Coast Revolution,* or even Nkrumah's autobiography. What all of us believed we understood, however—whatever our level of sub-Saharan sophistication—was that we composed a unique vanguard, that we were bit players in the second act of a world-historic drama, agents in sync with the Zeitgeist. It was simply infra dig not to feel portentous in the capital of a country whose leader's statue towered above Parliament Square with this eschatological maxim inscribed on its pedestal: "Seek you first the political kingdom, and all else shall be added unto you."

My first days at the university I now recall with less than professional gratification. Installed temporarily in imposing Akuafo Hall, informally welcomed over pints of bitter by Irwin and Boahen in the chatty, still "veddy" British faculty lounge, I dawdled and socialized. Africa is almost invariably experienced in overload the first time, what with one's busy senses sorting and transmitting more visual and aural stimuli in an hour than would fill a Northern Hemisphere day. In Africa, one *hears* in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Technicolor. So much sun, jollity, and beer, and such stretched-out days, each of whose hours somehow lasted longer than sixty minutes, conduced to putting off lectures from day to day in the time remaining before the first Michaelmas-term classes began. Despite the rhetoric extolling new models of Pan-African culture and politics, a rhetoric that seemed to become daily more superheated in the *Ghanaian Times,* the bwana lifestyle enjoyed by the university faculty gave scant signs of deviating from what it had been in the heyday of the colonizing British, many of whom were still jauntily much in evidence about the university and in commercial offices in the city. Only the color of the bwanas was changing.

It was a lifestyle that was casually devoted to the enjoyment of goods and services with as little actual display of vulgar money as possible. Food purchased at the Legon buttery was debited from one's monthly salary. Drinks at one's affiliated hall went on one's running tab. The Morris, Peugeot, or VW dealership in Accra handed over keys to the car of choice as soon as the prospective owner arrived with the requisite automobile-allowance forms prepared by a university staff person. Menial chores—cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping in the local markets—conducted themselves on autopilot once the serious business of acquiring a steward ("boy" had only recently been expunged from the domestic lexicon) had been completed. Over the course of two days, several flawlessly deferential men of indeterminate age materialized, like well-mannered process servers, to press references from previous employers into my hands. A salary supplement for stewards all too easily encouraged the beneficiary to suspend whatever social and economic qualms he or she harbored about the novel luxury of acquiring an all-purpose servant. While I was settling on Philemon, the diminutive, articulate Nigerian whose pleasure it would henceforth be to serve me, the university's lodgings office assigned me permanent accommodations, a new, two-bedroom bungalow in the suburb of Kotobabi, about a fifteen-minute drive from campus.

The desultory lecture preparation during those precious first days at Legon was, then, not altogether due to my behaving like a tourist. Cars, stewards, permanent housing, paperwork at the bank, eventual airport recovery of missing suitcases, as well as letters of greetings to family members of Ghanaian acquaintances in London (not to mention one or two reassuring airmails to my skeptical mother in Atlanta), filled blocks of time that had already been reduced by the cascades now crashing down each day. Clapped heartily on the shoulder by a classmate from undergraduate days at Fisk University—Preston King, a fellow Georgian whose route to the politics department had also come via the London School of Economics—I readily acceded to his suggestion of a mad dash orientation about Legon and around Accra before the rainy season (Sep-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tember to November) started in earnest. Taking King up on his offer resulted in an excursion that proved a mixed blessing—a useful introduction to much of what I would very likely have experienced on my own or with a less prodigal expenditure of time. With King's Beetle pointing the way, I went whirring across the full sweep of the campus for the first time on a blindingly beautiful morning, after taking delivery of my own German version of an insect crossed with a clock. On my first afternoon in Ghana, a taxi had taken me up the airport road that rose arrow-straight from the plain to the Legon plateau, on through the university's imposing post-and-lintel gate. My first impression had been of elegant linearity, of parallel roadways bordered by palm trees, of rectangular reflecting pools and topiary order imposed on gorgeous vegetation. But it was only when I took in the panorama of the university from the parking plaza in front of Commonwealth Hall, the highest promontory on the campus, that the full significance of President Nkrumah's achievement truly registered.

The Republic of Ghana was spending a larger percentage of its gross national product on education than any other country in the world, education that was compulsory and free from the primary grades through three years of secondary schooling. Admission to the nation's three universities, at Kumasi, Cape Coast, and Legon, also free, was limited to the top sixth form or junior college graduates who were selected through rigorous national examinations modeled on those of the University of London. No expense had been spared in building the University of Ghana, the flagship of the country's higher education. Its buildings shimmered in the noonday sun below Commonwealth Hall like cords of ivory arranged on a carpet of greensward. The eclectic architecture suggested Stanford in whitewash and Chinese pagodas streamlined and roofed in red tile. There were towered structures—the well-stocked library, the science center, faculty high-rise apartments, Commonwealth Hall's spires visible from the outskirts of the capital—along with large but not impersonal residence halls, which bore the great names in the early struggle for Gold Coast independence, Akuafo and Mensah Sarbah, as well as the place names of significant activity, Legon and Volta. Set back from the strip of asphalt curving upward from the campus to Commonwealth Hall, then descending outward to the campus perimeter, were scores of red-tiled faculty bungalows that looked as if they might have been impeccably unearthed at Pompeii.

Cranking up my Beetle, I felt a frisson of admiration that told me why I was standing on the top of a hill in West Africa on an annual salary of £1,380 as an hour of rainfall swept in from the Atlantic. Because Preston King had come to Ghana more than a year before in the first wave of expatriate academics, he moved about the place with an almost affected self-assurance. I had known him most of my adult life, from the Great

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books curriculum we slogged through together as undergraduates to graduation with honors and Phi Beta Kappa keys from Fisk in 1956. King's master's in political theory had earned a distinction from the LSE. Published as *The Fragmentation of Power: Proudhon, Renouvier, and Sorel,* it is still a remarkable piece of thinking today and, along with his Festschrift in honor of Karl Popper and a big book on toleration, explains why his professional reputation in Great Britain has withstood his dubious status as a U.S. citizen who can never go home again without going to prison. King was a premature anti-war resister, having defied the summons of his Albany, Georgia, "neighbors" on the ground that any citizen who was expected to lay down his life for his country deserved the courtesy of being addressed by the common title "Mister." Albany's white power structure had been especially sensitive just then to any defiance of Jim Crow etiquette, as the city had only barely escaped humiliation at the hands of Martin Luther King, Jr.,'s new Southern Christian Leadership Conference. At the end of a farcical trial in his hometown federal courthouse, during which gallused redneck jurors stared blankly as he quoted Thoreau, Preston King, still in possession of his passport, had elected to return to a dress-rehearsal teaching position at the LSE rather than await the outcome of an appeal from his two-year sentence.

I was to find that my friend was only one of the more special people among the gifted, dedicated, colorful, and zany African American expatriates of whom Ghana seemed to have a surplus in the fall of 1963. I went off with King to begin meeting them. Many we ran into in the commons in one or another university hall. Others we met at three or four city watering holes where expatriates were introduced to the High Life, the infectiously simple national dance, and to Club beer, the robust and equally infectious national brew. Conversation inclined to the declamatory in such places. The topic was invariably, obsessively, American racism. People talked agitatedly past one another far into the hot nights, to the usually polite sufferance of Ghanaians drawn into the vortex of stateside expostulation. Atlanta, the South's symbol of segregation with a human face and the city that had given birth to the term *establishment,* was losing the civilities that had characterized its race relations. Ghana Broadcasting and the BBC reported massive civil rights demonstrations in which Martin Luther King, Jr., seemed to be sprinting in order to lead impatient students from the five Atlanta University colleges who were far more responsive to marching orders from James Forman and Julian Bond, of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. While the shaken Atlanta establishment groped for accommodation, its vaunted interracial consensus now in tatters, Ghana newspapers headlined the racial demonstrations that were spreading north, notably to Chicago, where 225,000 schoolchildren boycotted classes in late October to protest the school system's policy of de facto segregation. It was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

accepted as gospel that no civil rights act would emerge from Congress, or that if President Kennedy signed one it would have been stripped of its Title VII equal employment provisions.

Only later would it dawn on me how surreal our rancorous discussions in these public spaces must have seemed to many Ghanaians. The syllogisms we propounded at the Ringway Club or in the common rooms of the university, and, far more often than was couth, in the homes of our hosts, brooked almost no qualification: compromise with racism was impossible; the American civil rights movement advanced through negotiation; hence, civil rights in America was an impossible achievement. By contrast, we entertained the most extravagant expectations of our Ghanaian cousins. We would have had the new state dangerously accelerate the indigenousness of the bureaucracy (temporarily sparing us, of course). We toasted the "freedom fighters" who were being trained in a remote secret encampment to destabilize conservative black African regimes, and we thought well of the deed when assassins liquidated Sylvanus Olympio, the pro-Western president of Togo. It was as though we expatriates expected to be compensated by Ghanaian audacity for the relative impotence and raging impatience we felt vis-à-vis the United States. Finally, like all armchair militants, we adjusted our antennae in order to detect signs of prudence or skepticism that we thought betokened an insidious agenda. Some learned to avoid others among us as if they were bearers of diseases or agents of the CIA. Ghanaians were often perplexed when they saw two black Americans execute the most dextrous footsteps in order to avoid meeting.

Making the rounds, I was quickly introduced to Guy Johnson, a tall, handsome young man who, having narrowly survived an automobile accident, looked a bit like the Headless Horseman as he hobbled about the campus braced and swaddled. Guy had a friend from New Orleans who seemed always to be at his side helping him move about—Leslie Alexander Lacy, another lively, voluble student impersonator. A few years later, Lacy enjoyed a flash of success when he published *The Rise and Fall of a Proper Negro,* an intriguing memoir about Ghana that blended fact and fiction ("faction," a category invented to describe Alex Haley's *Roots,* was still years away). The book opened with a calm Preston King knocking on Lacy's door to deliver early-morning news of the successful 1966 coup against Nkrumah. "Preston was always logical and efficient," says the narrator. "His mind worked like a computer." Logical and efficient, perhaps, but, Lacy might have added, very often wrong.

Guy's mother was Maya Angelou. An arresting, Junoesque presence, she had come to Ghana from Cairo, intending to spend only a few days settling her boy into the university before going on to a public relations job in Liberia. Guy's messy automobile accident had altered those plans,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and she now served as administrative assistant in the Institute of African Studies. Angelou had more personality than a stage filled with opera singers. She had played a much-noticed part in the 1961 off-Broadway production of Jean Genet's *The Blacks.* Angelou, like Lacy, would write a Ghana book, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes,* that reanimated the feuds, foibles, and vicarious passions of the black expatriate community. When Malcolm X passed through Ghana on his return from Mecca, Angelou self-importantly presumed to tutor him on the local political situation, only to find herself humbled, she wrote, by his instant ability to divine the configuration of powerful players. In that book, she also wrote of her friendship with Efua Sutherland, another Junoesque woman of remarkable innate ability and acquired tact, who directed the National Theatre of Ghana. Sutherland helped arrange Pete Seeger's rollickingly successful concert, which took place in her new amphitheater a few months after I arrived. Angelou's good friend and protector, the novelist Julian Mayfield, served as one of President Nkrumah's most trusted advisers. One usually got to see Mayfield by invitation only—unless one was accompanied by King, who seemed to have the widest possible entrée. Mayfield was preoccupied with the startup vexations of *West Africa,* a monthly journal he hoped to make the *Encounter* of the region (though it was subsidized by Ghanaian special funds, of course, rather than, as with *Encounter,* by the CIA).

Richard Wright had been in a dour mood during his famous inspection tour, ten years earlier, of the West African states that were emerging out of colonialism. His dyspeptic book *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* occasioned something of a scandal among Pan-Africanists. Julia Wright Hervé clearly shared none of her father's aversions to Nkrumah's one-party state. She was delicate, olive-skinned, and mature for her young years in the way that a thorough lycée education can nurture. But Julia Hervé was also angry and obsessed. She was certain that her father's fatal coronary had been faked by CIA agents in an out-of-the-way medical facility in Paris and that one of her father's murderers, a genial African American, was now teaching at the university. She and her somewhat taciturn Algerian husband edited and published *L'Etincelle* ("The Spark"), a Marxist monthly that remorselessly pilloried capitalism and the CIA.

Before I plunged into last-minute lecture writing in my Kotobabi bungalow, my last sortie took me to a large dwelling in Accra's Cantonments Road section, a neighborhood of imposing houses occupied by diplomats, bankers, and agents of global business cartels. Until his death at ninety-five in late August, a frail but mentally alert Du Bois had dutifully received a succession of votive visitors who seemed to arrive at his home via conveyor belt—Chinese and Russian diplomats, FLN heroes, Egyptian officials, notables of the international academic community,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

students of all stripes, and African American tourists. Meeting Shirley Graham-Du Bois, his vivacious sixty-seven-year-old widow, was a poignant compensation that nevertheless underscored the poor timing of my coming to Ghana. I would have had questions about Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, Du Bois's two exits from the NAACP, his conflict with Walter White, what he thought about Martin Luther King, Jr. There would be no after-dinner wisdom imparted to me, as there had been to Lacy two days before the great man's death—that the greatest difference between Du Bois and Washington was that Washington "had felt the lash [of slavery] and I had not." Oddly, of that meeting with Graham-Du Bois I recall only a pleasing flirtatiousness that was rather surprising in a woman of her years.

Unlike many of the British, I preferred not to lecture in academic regalia. Even though LSE crimson would have stood up well in the robed florescence of Oxford and Cambridge, the ninety-degree weather made the conceit distinctly unappealing. Many of the students who went about draped in black did so as much to conceal threadbare everyday wear as from any deference to hoary medieval university traditions. After the first weeks of the term, rain and heat triumphed for the most part over European tradition and undergraduate sartorial modesty. As for the success of lectures, confidences shared by my history colleagues Kirkpatrick Sale from New York and Albert Van Dantzig of Amsterdam quickly revealed a common experience of eleventh-hour redaction and pedagogical virtuosity. Like the protagonist in *Lucky Jim,* a novel popular in British collegiate circles of the period, I would find myself lapsing into colorful improvisation out of dog-eared copies of H. A. L. Fisher's *History of Europe* and Jan Huizinga's *Waning of the Middle Ages.* I forgave myself for winging two lectures on the Renaissance out of the syncretizing Durants, Will and Ariel.

All of us faculty newcomers had succumbed to the debating forums raging in the faculty lounges; to the exploration of the slave forts that stippled the Atlantic coast (Van Dantzig's *Forts and Castles of Ghana* would become the tourist's primer); and to the excitement and curiosity of a capital humming with marching masses, military displays, stern Soviet-bloc technicians, and government buildings under construction that would house a host of new alphabet-soup agencies reminiscent of those in FDR's Washington. As for El Mina, Cape Coast, and the other coastal slave forts from which several million men, women, and children (and very probably my own lineal ancestors) had been spooned into the Middle Passage aboard schooners, my reactions were always deeply troubled and even self-protectively stoic. To brood over the full meaning of that prolonged holocaust was, I believed, to run the risk of emotional capsize into the profoundest cynicism and bitterness.

Somehow, none of us neophytes performed disastrously. Ghanaian

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

undergraduates radiated zeal for learning. They transcribed every word of a lecture. Their infrequent questions, posed in lilting British English, were usually circumspectly to the point. They left my classroom directly for cavernous Balme Library to become better acquainted with the Hildebrandine controversy that ended in the Concordat of Worms or to explore the new social and political *mentalités* emerging at the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine and in the writings of Petrarch and Abelard, Machiavelli and Guicciardini. The life chances of these young men and women had been enhanced a hundredfold by examination scores that divided their fixed pasts from their open futures with a starkness virtually inconceivable in the United States: yesterday the neolithic village, tomorrow the global village of service in government, the diplomatic corps, business, the professions, the arts. These were the young people whose urbanizing lives would form the grist of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* the classic African novel about modernization. An expression I sometimes overheard among the uneducated classes revealed the social cleavages already well advanced between many of my students' immediate predecessors and their simpler countrymen and women. "Beentos," they were called—Ghanaians who returned from Europe culturally overexposed.

Looking back, I've often wondered about the intrinsic value of a course on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (British and European History: 1200–1500) and have decided that its irrelevancy was probably more apparent than real. If the original design of the course was the inculcation of Anglophone cultural dependency—analogous to the model of instruction in the former French colonies, where the primordial history lesson reputedly began with *"Nos ancêtres, les Gaulois"*—then I think I largely subverted that intent. Believing then as now that one of the cardinal insights in any course on the history of institutions should be that of the philosophical contemporaneity of the problem of power, I trust that my students were as provoked as they seemed amused by such overreaches as comparing the consolidation of royal power among the Ashanti to that among the Plantagenet English.

Political power in Nkrumah's Ghana was a silent auditor in the classroom, a looming presence of which many of us, faculty and students alike, were becoming increasingly and uncomfortably conscious. Yet we couldn't easily question it openly, or hold it to account, without transgressing national sensibilities—not to mention violating the implicit terms of our employment. The infamous Kulungugu bomb plot had taken place months before my arrival, but its reverberations, rather than fading, had only become louder in the hectic months since. Osagyefo President Nkrumah had survived unscathed after a powerful device planted near an outdoor stage exploded during a political rally in north-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ern Ghana. High-ranking officials and even a member of the Supreme Court had been implicated. There had been a rash of emergency decrees, preventive detention of suspects, a ratcheting up of anti-Western rhetoric in the press and on the radio. Hiram Basner, the white South African expatriate who served as Nkrumah's fire-and-brimstone press lord, supplied editorials for the *Ghanaian Times* that helped push the citizenry of the capital into a state of paranoid hysteria. But it was not solely a matter of Basner and his epigones once again corroborating the axiom about the believability of the biggest lie. Some of what they wrote about sinister internal and external forces undermining the Nkrumah regime was true. And some of those forces, as Richard Mahoney, the apostate son of the then-current U.S. ambassador would write twenty years later in *JFK: Ordeal in Africa,* were encouraged, if not actually orchestrated, by the CIA. Many years later, after an afternoon over tea outside Washington with the casually elegant Yale man who had been CIA mission chief during my stay, I concluded that paranoiacs in Nkrumah's Ghana had had very real and potent enemies.

Yet it became harder not to believe that Ghana often managed to be its own worst enemy—that CIA agents, neocolonialists, and parasitic expatriates too often served as surrogates for problems of the Ghanaians' own making. The political monopoly exercised by the Convention People's Party (CPP) fostered corruption that trickled down from high government officials to humble clerks, greatly exacerbating the customary venality. Unless one had powerful connections, nothing happened in one's dealings with a once fairly honest bureaucracy without "dash"—the lubricating bribe. Equally grave was the vigor with which party loyalty trumped merit. A favorite story of the day, plausible though probably apocryphal, claimed that a new official in the energy ministry had canceled a petroleum agreement because the oil was described as crude. In the absence of meaningful checks and balances, costly miscalculations were inevitable. Russian jetliners purchased for Ghana Airways, frigates acquired for the fledgling navy, the creation of an atomic energy commission, the headlong rush into state-subsidized steel production were notable examples of the regime's fondness for projects motivated by a mixture of prestige and ideology. Friendship with the son and daughter-in-law of an imprisoned Supreme Court justice afforded me a special pipeline into high-level Ghanaian gossip about the alarming psychological condition of the head of state, said alternately to be suffering from delusions of grandeur fed by sycophants or to be reduced to quivering agoraphobia after the attempts on his life.

Even in those days deeply lived for the moment, many of us at the university suspected that the political theory that would dominate Africa's future was being worked out in Ghana, that the curse of rule by the "big man" (or of "sultanism," as economist George Ayittey aptly calls

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it in *Africa in Chaos*) already lay upon the continent. Democracy was an ideal presently incompatible with African realities, a someday possibility to be preceded by a lengthy experiment in *Führerprinzip*—or so the condescending ideologues of what was coming to be called Nkrumahism cockily explained. The multiparty competition that worked well enough in Europe and the frequent rotation of power between two parties in the United States were dismissed as a formula that would promote tribal anarchy in Africa. Individual liberty was a concept too luxurious in the short term for African regimes whose survival depended in the long term, it was asserted, on devising *étatiste* strategies to skip over as many of the West's stages of capital formation and technological breakthrough as possible. As H. Rap Brown might have said, dictatorship was as African as foo-foo, the Ghanaian national dish of puréed cassava.

It would have been easy enough to insinuate into a cautionary lecture the struggle to curtail monarchical power in thirteenth-century England and its relevancy to Nkrumah's Ghana. However, with the exception of one or two contrived lapses, I resisted doing so—mainly out of courtesy, yet also, admittedly, because I was uneasy about the climate of suspicion that polluted the university. But until the dispute about the existence of student spies was dramatically resolved a few months later when several Ghanaian faculty members were arrested and as many foreign teachers expelled, many of us expatriates found it easy to deny the force of Acton's dictum in Ghana.

After all, I had had the exhilarating experience, shared by tens of thousands, of coming within Osagyefo Nkrumah's remarkable force field. The ceremony that brought the president to Legon soon after the opening of Michaelmas term in his capacity as university chancellor temporarily negated my doubts about dictatorship. Conor Cruise O'Brien, himself a larger-than-life personality of Irish fluency and opinion who normally dominated distinguished occasions, receded into appropriate subordination after a glowing introduction on the lawn of Akuafo Hall. Nkrumah had appointed O'Brien vice chancellor of the University of Ghana in recognition of O'Brien's controversial policy, as United Nations representative, for ending the secession of Katanga Province in Lumumba's Congo. Critics in Eisenhower's State Department considered this a reckless gamble; most African leaders considered it an act of anti-imperialist audacity. Although Nkrumah spoke briefly, and not at all in the British English of the Beentos—somewhat indistinctly, even—he imposed himself by an ineffable vitalism that exuded quicksilver intelligence, genuine humanity, and reserves of energy. He appeared larger than his trim, rather delicate frame. His eyes were startlingly bright. In the afterglow of his visit, I was inclined to believe that there was much more promise of enlightenment than of true despotism.

I thus paid attention to reports of positive developments: the on-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

schedule construction by an Italian consortium of the mammoth Akosombo Dam on the Volta River, a project that would provide Ghana with a surplus of electric power for decades; the completion of the superhighway connecting the capital with the modern, deepwater port at Tema. While I was in this optimistic state, my students provided the most sobering instruction I have ever received in the irony of history. I was in the midst of a lecture, its subject long since forgotten, that was obviously failing to engage the normally attentive class.

"Sir, perhaps you would wish to excuse us early," someone said politely. When I asked why, he said, "The president has been killed."

So there it was. Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, the African Redeemer, was no more. Stammering condolences, excusing my ignorance of their great tragedy, I told my students to hurry away, only to be informed by these patient young Ghanaians that the assassinated president was John F. Kennedy. On that indelible evening—November 22—I walked in a trance to the faculty lounge, where a mix of stupefied Americans, Europeans, and Ghanaians had gathered, and I knew that the end of American innocence, many times announced by historians, had actually come.

Michaelmas term ended a month after the Kennedy assassination. Van Dantzig, my Dutch colleague, and I decided to head for the Ivory Coast and as many contiguous countries as we could fit into the break between terms. Driving in my Volkswagen northwest from Legon via Kumasi, the old capital of the Ashanti kingdom and Ghana's second largest city, we stopped just long enough to visit the campus of the University of Kumasi. Its architecture, consonant with its science mission, was as modern as Legon's was classic.

We sped on to Sunyani for the night, locating the government guest house and savoring a meat dish whose species we decided not to try to identify. The next morning, the macadamized road brought us within a few miles of the Ivory Coast border, at which point it shriveled into a rutted trail that wound through secondary growth before abruptly oozing into a water-filled ravine. Sinking into the muddy water up to our waists, we floated the Beetle out of Ghana and entered France's most prosperous former colony below the Sahara at Maso, a sleepy and surprised frontier post. French bureaucracy mated to African ceremony delayed us for much of the day, as the grave matter of visas awaited the return telephone call from Abidjan disclosing the fate of two *professeurs anglophones de l'université.* While we waited, a café run by a French family supplied an edible imitation of a Left Bank meal of *croque-monsieur, pommes frites,* and *vin rouge.* Visaed and saluted, Van Dantzig and I rattled off in a southerly direction for Abidjan, making a quick stop or two for gas and fresh fruit as we passed through Abengourou, Bettie, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anyama, urban centers whose city halls and post offices faithfully replicated their French models.

Abidjan materialized like Shangri-la at high noon. A shimmering, modern metropolitan marvel around a lake, the capital of the Ivory Coast was Geneva in the tropics. Unlike the streets of Accra, where men wore short-sleeved shirts and women loose-fitting dresses, Abidjan's boulevards were like runways at a Paris fashion show, with elegantly suited men and women dressed for the spectacle. Omnipresent in positions of authority, stylish Ivorians conducted their business in impeccable French as officiously as Parisians in similar positions. They came in a range of skin tones uncommon in Ghana (many of them were barely distinguishable from their French counterparts). All were unmistakably more Gallic than most of the Anglophone Africans of my acquaintance were British. At the ostentatious Hôtel Ivoire, with its gelid air conditioning, five-star restaurant, and ice-skating rink, we risked the price of lunch before being directed to affordable lodgings in Treicheville, *le quartier indigène,* by a haughty Ivorian receptionist visibly pained by my impure French.

Treicheville was only a few miles from the city center, but it might as well have been in another country: no fashionable jeans outlined the bottoms of the young women there, no jackets and neckties signaled men of influence. Like the favelas ringing Rio de Janeiro, Treicheville was a sprawling, fetid smear along the flank of gleaming Abidjan. This was how most people in Africa lived. The Ivory Coast of grand avenues, high buildings, and safe, shaded residential quarters was a virtual-reality phenomenon dependent on French investments in a franc-zone economy macromanaged from Paris and micromanaged in Abidjan by a large population of generously salaried French who kept low profiles in inner offices. Most of the vast cocoa plantations seen on our drive from the Ghana frontier were owned either outright or indirectly by the French, with the important exception of those belonging to Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the pliable though wily Ivorian president, and the inner circle of his Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire.

There was plenty of evidence that Houphouët-Boigny's well-managed economy was investing in schools, clinics, roads, light industry, and rural electrification. A stroll on the campus of the handsome national university afforded sufficient time to learn that the government de-emphasized liberal arts and law in favor of science and technical education, not only to increase the supply of technicians but also as a precaution against dissent. Not all the revenues from the world's second largest cocoa producer left for France, but a large fraction of them did, and much of the remainder stayed in the hands of the dominant political class. Meanwhile, I had to wonder whether high birthrates and in-migration by the new West African proletariat would cause Treicheville to grow exponentially in the coming years. Thirty-five years after Van Dantzig and I passed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through, Robert Kaplan's vivid, depressing book, *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey at the Dawn of the 21st Century,* claims that Treicheville's denizens have almost captured Abidjan, bringing with them violent crime, poverty, AIDS, and the disoriented ethos of the African underclass trapped between the debris of the broken past and the jury-rigged present. Today, private armies protect fashionable stores during the day and fashionable restaurants at night. The once-robust Ivorian economy has slipped badly, according to Kaplan's digest of World Bank figures, and seems headed downward with most of the other GDPs of Africa.

In the winter of 1963, however, much of Africa appeared to be an inspiring possibility about to happen. As we sped over the well-graded dirt road running diagonally across the Ivory Coast to the Guinean frontier in the far northwest, it hardly seemed ordained that this part of the continent would fall off the world economic map. White-painted primary schools and hospitals abounded. Streams were forded by concrete bridges. Time and again, we stuck our foreheads out the car window to catch the cooling roadside spray from ubiquitous irrigation grids.

At Yamoussoukro, we ran head-on into the phenomenon of the African Big Man. As the president's elongated motorcade announced itself in a cacophony of sirens and motorcycle backfires, I obediently braked and drove into the ditch. Van Dantzig thought Houphouët-Boigny nodded benevolently as he sped by, apparently on his way to Abidjan from his plantation palace at Yamoussoukro. By the early 1990s, the village of Yamoussoukro would become the official capital of the Ivory Coast and the site of the Basilica of Our Lady of Peace, a half-billion-dollar structure larger than St. Peter's that Kaplan, following our route to Danane, would see in all its Catholic glory looming "from miles away across an undulating sea of coconut palms." This gargantuan monument, which cost more than the Akosombo Dam, became Houphouët-Boigny's mausoleum, a preposterous symbol of national priorities decreed by one man.

From the southeastern corner of Sékou Touré's Marxist Guinea through the lyrically named N'Zerékoré (where we had our only contact with a few of the proud people of that economically isolated country), our route made a forty-five-degree turn south out of Guinea into the forested Liberian hill country. Customs agents at the last stop in the Ivory Coast had warned us that the roads in Liberia were largely theoretical. At some place lost from the record, we nearly killed ourselves as a "mammy wagon" filled to capacity sprang at us out of the night from a bend in the road. Assisted by the wagon riders, we pulled our car from its ditch, pressed open the front fender, and replaced the tire. The next day, we managed to demolish the left front and rear tires on a rock embedded in the road. Three days passed in an excited village where we were smothered by female attention while the local mechanic slowly, amazingly, cannibalized his heap of moldering discards to patch together two air-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tight tires. Off again for Monrovia, we were overtaken by Liberian military police, charged with reckless driving and unspecified damage to property, and forced to return more than a hundred miles to the scene of the wagon encounter. There was a large fine, much stamping of documents, and a stern admonition from a major in immaculate army fatigues to drive away and sin no more. As we reached the outskirts of the Liberian capital, I felt, in a way Van Dantzig could not, a sense of *déjà vu.* The wider streets, the bigger windows, and the taller doors; the swagger, the baseball caps, and the tennis shoes; the smack of chewing gum, the big smiles, and the welcoming waves—these were America. Monrovia could have been Savannah or Athens, Georgia.

But William Shadrach Tubman's Liberia, with its ruling Americo-Liberian elite, True Whig Party, and star-and-stripes banner, was still far more an unsettling African mixture of before-and-becoming than it was a copy of the United States, as our halt before a twenty-story building nearing completion revealed. The construction foreman, a genial Frenchman, informed us that the structure was to replace the old presidential mansion, a two-story house with a tin roof in the heart of the city. Van Dantzig and I were invited to tour the new executive mansion. Lavishly furnished with apparently no consideration for cost, the beautifully finished rooms became more luxurious floor by floor as the elevator transported us to rococo penthouse apartments filled with Aubusson carpets and crystal chandeliers. The genial Frenchman joked about the value of the contract to the French decorating firm as he pointed to the Rubens-inspired ceiling in the presidential dining room. *"Ils ont bien payé,"* he chuckled, tapping a gilded door frame.

Most of downtown Monrovia had the run-down appearance of much of the separate-but-equal South I knew well, but, as in the case of the French-built skyscraper on the major highway, the Liberian capital showed evidence of being an exciting work in progress. "New buildings (three of them skyscrapers) have been erected, new roads, and signs of more progress to come patent everywhere," I wrote home at the time. The country's Methodist bishop, a friend of my deceased father's with whom we stayed, spoke confidently of revenues flowing from new copper mines and of the cadre of technicians finally beginning to return home from America. The bronze statue of Tubman holding a cigar à la Churchill was supported by a pedestal whose engraved text of many paragraphs proclaimed the fiscal virtues of a twenty-year-old presidency. One read that, through balanced budgets and austere expenditures, the president had finally enabled the country to repay the crippling 1926 loan from the Firestone Rubber Company in 1956. Liberia offered stability, a secure market economy, and a vigilant aversion to the African initiatives of the Russians and the Chinese.

Notwithstanding the bishop's approval rating, ordinary citizens

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

readily volunteered disgusted opinions about the country's crony capitalism. Only card-carrying members of the True Whig Party seriously suggested that the anticipated wealth from the new mineral explorations would make any difference in the lives of the common people. Public primary and secondary education was sketchy at best. Although the regime's long, brutal repression of the inland ethnic groups—Kpelle, Mano, Kwa—was scarcely detectable from the windows of a Volkswagen, our upcountry encounter with the military police alerted us somewhat to their occupation-army mentality. Even so, as we headed upcountry again for the border and a problematic return to Ghana, the Liberian arrangement of bribes, divide-and-rule, and slow assimilation appeared to be flexible enough to last indefinitely. Seventeen years later, the indefinite came to an end in a bloody coup d'état that permanently destroyed Americo-Liberian hegemony. Tubman's successor would be disemboweled in his bed by an illiterate master sergeant. The little country of two million plunged into perpetual warfare among its ethnic groups, losing one percent of its population, most of its already rudimentary infrastructure, the housing stock of the capital, and the twenty-story presidential palace in which Van Dantzig and I had been treated to a guided tour.

We arrived at the Ghanaian border in early January, exhausted after two weeks of traveling, and riding on fumes. Ghana was sealed. There had been another attempt on Nkrumah's life. Informed by the correct but not cordial Ghanaian frontier constabulary that we couldn't wait out the state of emergency at their post, we were forced to reenter the Ivory Coast in search of gas, a quest that evoked considerable suspicion on the part of the understandably edgy Ivorian gendarmes, given the direction whence we came and our Ghana license plates. Allowed to buy fuel with all but our last pounds, we were advised to depart. For the moment, our fate mimicked that of the Flying Dutchman (Van Dantzig *was* Dutch); we were spectral professors condemned indefinitely to driving about in the nether region between two countries. Tacking south along the frontier, we again reached Maso, which had a direct telephone line to the capital. Vice Chancellor O'Brien himself vouched for our bona fides when he answered the officer's early-morning phone call. Van Dantzig and I limped through the gates of Legon at the end of the day. Lent term began three days later, on January 10.

The political atmosphere in the country deteriorated radically over the next months. The Ghanaian president ceased appearing in public almost entirely. The radio and the press denounced enemies within the country and imperialist plots from without. The country was swept by "spontaneous" mass rallies of workers and peasants waving prefabricated signs that proclaimed revolutionary indignation and renewed faith in socialism, a sort of Cultural Revolution Lite, anticipating by only four

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

years Mao's scripted terror. Like FBI agents surveilling the American Communist Party during the fifties, Ghanaian intelligence agents appeared in droves, front row center, at public gatherings and university assemblies. Adu Boahen, my department chairman; Neville Crabbe, my closest Ghanaian friend; and John Fynn, who wrote me regularly from London, were far more outspoken in deploring the civil liberties excesses of the regime than other Ghanaians I knew, yet I suspected that they were right when they claimed their views were secretly shared by many of their intimidated compatriots.

By now, I knew a few of my students well enough to discuss the current political situation off the record. Several seemed genuinely bewildered by the decibel level of officially sponsored acrimony against "neocolonialist intellectuals" and "covert enemies of Marxism-Nkrumahism"; others insisted that the regime had to defend itself by every means at its disposal, although they worried that the crisis was being exploited by sycophants and opportunists at Flagstaff House and in the CPP. Kwame Gyekye, the student I came to know best, took the long view: Africa's ancient values of community would in time prevail, annealed by the transient experiences of colonialism and dictatorship. Gyekye's philosophical bent would become his vocation after graduate study in the United States. With the appearance in 1997 of *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience,* he achieved the status of English-speaking Africa's outstanding philosopher. Off-the-record political conversations with students abruptly ended, however, when the security police barreled onto the campus in mid-February to arrest several Ghanaian and several expatriate lecturers on charges of plotting to overthrow the government. The Africans went into preventive detention; the expatriates, one of them an African American friend of mine, were deported.

A few days after this stunning faculty roundup, I had a rare opportunity to corroborate the claim made by Boahen, Crabbe, and Fynn about the fundamental reasonableness and civility of Ghanaians. Walking on the campus into a group of "revolutionary workers and peasants" whose posters demanded that all foreigners be expelled, I was menacingly ordered to declare my nationality. U.S. citizenship used to perform its wonders in mysterious ways and places. The Ugly American despised as an abstraction was more often than not cordially saluted in the flesh in Africa. "Welcome to Ghana, brother," their leader shouted, shaking my hand warmly after hearing that I was an American from Atlanta, Georgia. They filed off again, posters aloft, their search for enemies of the state to continue until lunch break.

There was no break, however, in the government's drumbeat against Americans. The first Peace Corps agreement in Africa had been negotiated with Ghana by a college classmate who would always regard it as his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

finest moment in government service. But now Peace Corps volunteers were being accused of spying for the CIA. "Indignant masses" marched on the American embassy, breaking windows and pulling down the flag. African Americans were skewered as fifth columnists, black people who served the imperialist ends of their white masters while pretending to be soul brothers and sisters to Africans. Many of us began to anticipate a knock on the door by state security officers, unpleasant interrogation, and a one-way ride to Accra airport. The head of Fynn's powerful clan, the regal Mrs. Annan, came by limousine on a mission of concern during the expatriate scare. If his silly people should threaten you, said she in so many words, referring to the Osagyefo, I was to call her immediately. Her family members had done much to make Nkrumah possible, but now that he and they were bitter enemies, I wondered whether her gracious generosity would be as useful, if I was arrested, as a special U.S. embassy telephone number that I had recently been given, thanks to my alarmed mother's plea to the junior senator from Georgia.

The next assassination attempt unhinged Nkrumah. This time, it was reported that he managed to dodge bullets fired by one of his own guards at point-blank range. Special units of the Chinese People's Liberation Army entered the country to take up strategic positions around the capital. The CIA's Yale man in Accra was convinced that a concrete airstrip capable of handling the huge Russian Antonov transport plane was nearing completion in the remote north. Meanwhile, the Legon campus was enveloped in the tense expectancy of a city in the path of a hurricane. Conor Cruise O'Brien was rumored to have told Nkrumah of his intention to resign the vice chancellorship at the end of the academic year. Boahen told us to order as many history titles for the library as possible. Friendly government sources had warned that the regime's depleted treasury, combined with Flagstaff House's antipathy to the university, made it likely that these import book orders would be the last to be filled for many years. One book that would not be in short supply, however, was *Conscientism,* an opaque, jargon-laden treatise—just off the press and ghostwritten by a Ghanaian professor in the philosophy department—that was intended to be the summa of Nkrumah's Afro-Marxist political philosophy. The ghostwriter's reward was a bright red Jaguar. The penalty imposed on the university community was that its members be required to assemble in the auditorium of Commonwealth Hall, along with the paramount chiefs and much of the diplomatic corps, to watch several hours of televised commentary on the book. It was Ghana's first public television transmission.

A fine institution's spirit was dying, and in the midst of our disorientation, Malcolm X appeared. Despite the rash of sponsored anti-Americanism, the Ghanaian government was plainly unenthusiastic about the timing of his arrival. For its purposes, the simultaneous visit of another

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American, Henry J. Kaiser, head of Kaiser Aluminum, held far greater significance than the propaganda dividend of a red carpet reception for America's racial bogeyman. The press and radio ballyhooed the national importance of an anticipated agreement between Nkrumah and Kaiser for the construction of an ore smelter whose gigantic machinery would be run on hydroelectric power cheaply supplied by the Akosombo Dam. Malcolm X came to campus to speak in Commonwealth Hall, therefore, not as a guest of the university administration but sponsored by a student association consisting for the most part, I suspected, of Leslie Lacy and his immediate circle. His speech drew at least as many faculty and students as the *Conscientism* ordeal, and was received with more evidence of genuine enthusiasm, although many of the Ghanaians seemed emotionally unready for the personal intensity of his profession of faith. Striding nervously back and forth on the stage like a lean, young lion, his voice cadenced to a stream of terrible evocations running from childhood through prison to solitary combat in diabolical White America, Malcolm X spoke movingly of his recent epiphany in Mecca. Not all white people were devils, he now realized. Racial justice could be achieved only in coalition with people of all colors who believed in equality. But Malcolm X had lost nothing of his old ferocity, and many of the Ghanaians, civil and moderate to a fault, recoiled as he lacerated white hypocrisy and malevolence.

Later that evening, there was an affair for Malcolm X at the Ghana Press Club. Uninvited and fascinated, I sped behind his entourage and slipped in with a large contingent of well-connected expatriates. The former Nation of Islam minister stood at the front of the room in a circle of admiring women. He spoke more calmly than in Commonwealth Hall, but his eyes remained fully charged as he answered questions posed mainly to show the audience's admiration. Malcolm X was clearly a man driven by large convictions, and it seemed to me that night that the seriousness of his purpose authorized at least one serious question. He had spoken emphatically of his determination to promote unity among the various civil rights organizations in the United States. But how, I asked Mr. X, could such a rapprochement come about between himself, an advocate of retaliatory violence, and Martin Luther King, Jr., the apostle of nonviolent passive resistance, without fundamental changes to his or King's beliefs, or both? His piercing eyes met mine. His tone was indulgent. I think he may have said something about mistaking appearances for realities, but the hiss rising from the audience was unnerving, and my concentration faltered so badly that I heard almost nothing.

A few weeks after Malcolm X's visit, sometime during the first week in early July, I asked for a meeting with the vice chancellor. Late resignations were hardly unexpected by then, and O'Brien merely expressed formal annoyance at the technical violation of my contract. Somewhat

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

later, I was amused to learn that his hearty congratulatory handshake on my new appointment was predicated on a mistake. Boahen told me that O'Brien had said that the Ghana history department should consider it a compliment to lose one of its members to Harvard. In fact, I was headed for Howard.

I left Ghana knowing a good deal more about myself than about West Africa. I felt I now needed to reconnect to an African struggle in America that had been under way for almost 350 years. When my plane touched down at JFK, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was less than two months old and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was heading for an epic credentials fight at the Democratic Convention that summer. I had set out for home under a cloud of chagrin; I would arrive to confront the belated awakening of my confused self. The unintended hubris underlying my African detour became a reproach compelling the admission that I had somehow expected Ghana and Africa to attenuate the civil rights disabilities of my class—privileged people of color for whom separate-but-equal America had been both materially advantageous and morally intolerable. For our benefit, we had ordained a shining Africa educating its young people, modernizing its institutions, implementing an ambitious agenda of political and economic democracy, forming links among its progressive nations, negotiating a dynamic neutrality between the superpowers, and, above all, sticking it to Uncle Sam in the United Nations for America's racial hypocrisy.

But Ghana, like the rest of the continent, was already headed pell-mell into dystopia by the end of my first academic year at Legon. I knew that political and economic conditions could only deteriorate. I knew, too, that my sometimes warm reception had always been as an American, not as a returning African. Ghanaians, unlike myself, had never indulged the illusion that my culture, accent, and appearance were irrelevant. They knew that I was an American. For better or worse, so, finally, did I, as would, in time, most of the class of '63.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

http://www.when_is_enough_enough?.com

Putting Microcomputers in Their Place

PAUL DE PALMA

In the misty past, before Bill Gates joined the company of the world's richest men, before the mass-marketed personal computer, before the metaphor of an information superhighway had been worn down to a cliché, I heard Roger Schank interviewed on National Public Radio. Then a computer science professor at Yale, Schank was already well known in artificial intelligence circles. Because those circles did not include me, a new programmer at Sperry Univac, I hadn't heard of him. Though I've forgotten the details of the conversation, I have never forgotten Schank's insistence that most people do not need to own computers.

That view, of course, has not prevailed. Either we own a personal computer and fret about upgrades, or we are scheming to own one and fret about the technical marvel yet to come that will render our purchase obsolete. Well, there are worse ways to spend money, I suppose. For all I know, even Schank owns a personal computer. They're fiendishly clever machines, after all, and they've helped keep the wolf from my door for a long time.

It is not the personal computer itself that I object to. What reasonable person would voluntarily go back to a typewriter? The mischief is not in the computer itself, but in the ideology that surrounds it. If we hope to employ computers for tasks more interesting than word processing, we must devote some attention to how they are actually being used, and

Paul De Palma is Associate Professor of Mathematics and Computer Science at Gonzaga University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beyond that to the remarkable grip that the idol of computing continues to exert.

A distressing aspect of the media attention paid to the glories of technology is the persistent misidentification of the computing sciences with microcomputer gadgetry. This manifests itself in many ways. Once my seatmate on a plane learns that I am a computer science professor, I'm expected to chat about the glories of the new DVD-ROM as opposed to the older CD-ROM drives, or about that home-shopping channel to the computer-literate, the World Wide Web, or about one of the thousand other dreary topics that fill *PC Magazine* and your daily paper, and that by and large represent computing to most Americans. On a somewhat more pernicious level, we in computer science must contend with the phenomenon of prospective employers who ask for expertise in this or that proprietary product. This has had the effect of skewing our mission in the eyes of students majoring in our field. I recently saw a student résumé that listed skill with Harvard Graphics but neglected to mention course work in data communications. Another recent graduate in computer science insisted that the ability to write WordPerfect macros belonged on her résumé.

This is a sorry state. How we got there deserves some consideration.

A few words of self-disclosure may be in order. What I have to say may strike some as churlish ingratitude to an industry that has provided me with a life of comparative ease for nearly two decades. The fact is that my career as a computer scientist was foisted upon me. When I discovered computers I was working on a doctorate in English at Berkeley and contemplating a life not of ease but of almost certain underemployment. The computer industry found me one morning on its doorstep, wrapped me in its generous embrace, and has cared for me ever since. I am paid well to puzzle out the charming intricacies of computer programs with bright, attentive students, all happy in the knowledge that their skills will be avidly sought out the day after graduation. I can go to sleep confident that were tenure to be abolished tomorrow, the industry would welcome me back like a prodigal son.

Yet for all its largesse, I fear the computer industry has never had my full loyalty. Neither did English studies, for that matter, but this probably says more about those drawn to the study of texts than about me. My memories of the time I spent in the company of the "best which has been thought and said" are hazy, perhaps because the study of literature is not so much a discipline as an attitude. The attitude that dominated all others when I was a student, that sustained my forays into the Western Americana of the Bancroft Collection, is that there is no text so dreary, so impoverished, so bereft of ideas that it does not cry out to be examined—deconstructed, as a graduate student a few years my junior might

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have said. But the text I now propose to examine, impelled, as it were, by early imprinting in the English department, goes beyond words on a page.

From an article here and a TV program there, from a thousand conversations on commuter trains and over lunch and dinner, from the desperate scrambling of local politicians after software companies, the notion that prosperity follows computing, like the rain that was once thought to follow the settler's plow, has become a fully formed mythology.

In his perceptive little book *Technopoly,* Neil Postman argues that all disciplines ought to be taught as if they were history. That way, students "can begin to understand, as they now do not, that knowledge is not a fixed thing but a stage in human development, with a past and a future." I wish I'd said that first. If all knowledge has a past—and computer technology is surely a special kind of knowledge—then all knowledge is contingent. The technical landscape is not an engineering necessity. It might be other than it is. Our prospective majors might come to us, as new mathematics or physics majors come to their professors, because of an especially inspiring high school teacher, because of a flair for symbol manipulation, or even because of a (dare I use the word?) curiosity about what constitutes the discipline and its objects of study—not simply because they like gadgets and there's a ton of money to be made in computing.

The misidentification of computer science with microcomputer gadgetry is a symptom of a problem that goes far beyond academe. Extraordinary assertions are being made about computers in general and microcomputers in particular. These assertions translate into claims on the American purse—either directly, or indirectly through the tax system. Every dollar our school districts spend on microcomputers is a dollar not spent reducing class size, buying books for the library, reinstating art programs, hiring school counselors, and so on. In fact, every dollar that each of us spends outfitting ourselves with the year's biggest, fastest microcomputer is a dollar we might have put away for retirement, saved for our children's education, spent touring the splendors of the American West, or even chosen not to earn. In the spirit of Neil Postman, then, I'd like to speculate about how the mythology of prosperity through computing has come to be and, in the process, suggest that like the Wizard of Oz, it may be less miraculous than it looks.

The place to begin is the spectacular spread of microcomputers themselves. By 1993 nearly a quarter of American households owned at least one. Four years later, the *Wall Street Journal* put this figure at over 40 percent. For a home appliance that costs at least a thousand dollars, probably closer to two, this represents a substantial outlay. The home market, as it turns out, is the smaller part of the story by far. The Census Bureau tells us that in 1995, the last year for which data are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

available, Americans spent almost $48 billion on small computers for their homes and businesses. This figure excludes software, peripherals, and services purchased after the new machines were installed.

The title of an article in the *Economist*—"Personal Computers: The End of Good Times?"—hints at the extraordinary world we are trying to understand. In it we learn that annual growth in the home computer market slowed from 40 percent in 1994 to between 15 percent and 20 percent in 1995. By the fall of 1998, market analysts were predicting 16 percent growth in the industry as a whole for the current year. Those of us involved in other sectors of the economy can only look on in astonishment. When a 20 percent, or even 16 percent, growth rate—well over five times that of the economy as a whole—is "the end of good times," we know we're in the presence of an industry whose expectations and promises have left the earth's gravitational pull.

To put some flesh on these numbers, let's try a thought experiment. The computer on my desk is about sixteen inches by seventeen inches. The Census Bureau tells us that the microcomputer industry delivered over eighteen million machines in 1994, the year when, according to the *Economist,* good times ended. Of these, perhaps a third went to the home market, the balance to business. At the 40 percent growth rate in the home market cited for that year and the more modest 16 percent growth rate for the business market, the boys in Redmond and Silicon Valley will have covered the United States's 3,679,192 square miles with discarded microcomputers well before my daughter, who is now thirteen, begins to collect Social Security.

Fabulous as they seem, these figures come from only part of the industry. Microcomputers do not define computing, despite their spectacular entry on the scene. The standard story goes like this. There was once a lumbering blue dinosaur called IBM that dominated the computer industry. In due course, smaller, more agile, and immensely more clever mammals appeared on the scene. The most agile and clever of these was Microsoft, which proceeded to expand its ecological niche and, in so doing, drove the feeble-minded IBM to the brink of extinction.

The business history in this story is as faulty as its paleontology. IBM may be lumbering and blue, but in 1997 its sales were nearly $78 billion. Compare that with Microsoft's $9 billion. The real story is not in the sales volumes of the two companies but in their profit margins. In 1997 IBM's was 7.7 percent, while Microsoft's was a spectacular 28.7 percent. This almost mythical earning capability is expressed best in *Forbes*'s annual list of very rich Americans. We don't hear much about IBM billionaires these days, but Microsoft fortunes are conspicuous in the *Forbes* list, with Bill Gates's $51 billion, Paul Allen's $21 billion, and Steven Ballmer's $10.7 billion. These fortunes were accumulated in less than twenty years from manufacturing a product that requires no materials beyond the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inexpensive medium it is stored on—not so different from a pickle producer whose only cost, after the first jar comes off the line, is the jar itself. It's a tale of alchemical transmutation if ever there was one. Is it really a surprise that most people don't know that IBM is still a very successful company or that computer science does not begin and end with Windows 98?

This joyous account of fortunes waiting to be made in the microcomputer industry has a dark side. Just as Satan is the real hero of *Paradise Lost,* as C. S. Lewis observed, so is popular fascination with computers due as much to the dark side as to the light. Despite generally good economic news for the past few years, Americans seem gloomy about their prospects. Our brave new world, paved over with networked computers from sea to shining sea, may well be one in which we are mostly unemployed or have experienced a serious decline in living standards. Computers, if not always at the center of the problem, are popularly thought to have been a major contributing factor.

Look at the substantial decline in manufacturing as a segment of the workforce in the United States. Between 1970 and 1996 (the last year for which data are available), the number of Americans employed increased by about fifty million. During this same period, the number of manufacturing jobs declined by about two hundred thousand. The culprit here is often thought to be computer technology, through assembly line robots or through U.S.-owned (or -contracted) manufacturing facilities in developing countries. Asia and Latin America, of course, would have less appeal to American corporations without worldwide data communications networks.

This analysis of the decline in manufacturing employment is perhaps more appealing than true. I will return to the relationship between computers and productivity. For now it's enough to observe that most people believe there is such a relationship. So if the money to be made in the computer industry is not sufficient inducement to vote for the next school bond issue that would outfit every classroom in your city with networked computers, then the poverty your children will certainly face without such a network should do the trick. With those staggering Microsoft fortunes in the background and the threat of corporate retrenchment in the foreground, I suppose I'm naïve to expect the strangers I chat with on planes to know that the computing sciences are more like mathematics and the physical sciences than like desktop publishing—or, for that matter, like the rush to the Klondike goldfields.

The emergence of the microcomputer as a consumer item in the past decade and a half has prompted a flood of articles in the educational literature promoting what has come to be called "computer literacy." In its most basic sense, this term appears to refer to something like a passing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

familiarity with microcomputers and their commercial applications, rather like the ability to drive a car and know when to get the oil changed. Sadly, the proponents of computer literacy have won the high ground by virtue of the term itself. Who would argue with literacy? It is, after all, one of the more complex human achievements. Not only is literacy a shorthand measure of a country's economic development, but as the rhetorician Walter J. Ong has long argued, once a culture becomes generally literate, its modes of conceptualization are radically altered. Literacy—like motherhood and apple pie in the America of my youth—is unassailable.

But what about the transformative nature of literacy? I am fully aware that similar claims have been made about computers: namely, that computers, like writing, will alter our modes of conceptualization. Maybe so, but not just by running Microsoft Office. I've developed a rule of thumb about claims of this sort. If the subject matter is computers and the tense of the claim is future (and, therefore, its truth value cannot be ascertained), look at the subtext. Is the claimant a salesman in disguise? To recognize the nonsense in the claim that computers will transform the way we think, we need only indulge in some honest self-examination. I would give up my word processor with great reluctance. This doesn't mean that my neuronal structure is somehow fundamentally different from what it was when I was writing essays similar to this one on my manual Smith Corona. It does mean that the computer industry is a smidgen richer because of my contribution. It also means, as was recently pointed out to me, that it is a good bit easier to run on at great length on a computer than on a typewriter.

Not surprisingly, the number of articles addressing computer literacy in the educational literature has kept pace with microcomputer developments. ERIC is a database of titles published in education journals. When I searched ERIC using the keywords "computer literacy" and "computer-literate," I found 97 articles for the years 1966–81, or an average of about 6 per year. The decade from 1982 to 1991 produced 2,703 hits, or about 270 per year. At first glance the production of articles since 1991 shows welcome signs of dropping off. But the Internet has come to the rescue of both the microcomputer industry and its prognosticators. When I add the terms "Internet," "World Wide Web," and "information superhighway" to the mix (subtracting for duplicates), the total rises to an astonishing 4,680 articles from 1992 through the first half of 1998. This works out to about 720 articles per year. The bulk of the recent articles, of course, are full of blather about the so-called information superhighway and how all those school districts that cannot give every child access to it will be condemning the next generation to lives of poverty and ignorance.

Since computer literacy advocates are eloquent on the benefits of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

computers in our schools (and equally eloquent on the grim fate that awaits those students not so blessed), a brief look at how microcomputers are actually used in primary and secondary schools is in order. Microcomputers are now a solid presence in American education. The U.S. Census Bureau put the number at nearly seven million in 1997, or just over seven students per machine, compared with eleven students per machine in 1994 and sixty-three per machine a decade earlier. Picture a classroom richly endowed with computers. Several students are bent over a machine, eyes aglow with the discoveries unfolding on the screen. Perhaps there is a kindly teacher in the portrait, pointing to some complex relationship that the computer has helped the budding physicists, social scientists, or software engineers to uncover. If this is the way you imagine primary and secondary school students using computers, you are dead wrong. Several important studies have concluded that primary and secondary school students spend more time mastering the intricacies of word processing than they do using computers for the kinds of tasks that we have in mind when we vote for a bond issue.

Programming, in fact, was the one area that school computer coordinators saw decline over previous years. I would be the first to acknowledge that programming does not define computer science. This simple fact is what makes the endless discussion of programming languages in computer science circles so tedious. Nevertheless, if computer science does not begin and end with programming, neither will it give up its secrets to those who cannot program. I greet the news that high school students do not program our millions of microcomputers as an English professor might greet the news that the school library is terrific but the kids don't read. Here is a puzzle worth more than a moment's thought. There is an inverse relationship between the availability of microcomputers to primary and secondary school students and the chance that those students will do something substantial with them. I am not saying that the relationship is causal, but the association is there. Draw your own conclusions.

Though the jury is still out on the potential educational benefits of computing, we all agree that skill with computers is necessary for success in business. Even here there's a problem. Recent studies have assembled evidence that should give computer enthusiasts some sleepless nights. It appears that most businesses would be better off had they taken all that money they spent on computer technology and put it into bonds at market rates. This investment has been substantial, as anyone knows who has seen the piles of unopened software, the manuals still in their shrink-wrapped plastic, and the stacks of obsolete hardware accumulating in storerooms around the country. By 1995, it had totaled over $4 trillion. This sum, it should be noted, excludes the public money in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

volved in training (and employing) academic computer scientists and engineers.

It also excludes another hidden expenditure. The time employees spend rearranging icons on their screens, the time they spend wondering why their spreadsheets will not recognize their printers, in fact all those minutes here and hours there spent fiddling with hardware and software, is time they do not spend on the tasks they are being paid to perform.

Let me tell a story. I have been a computer science professor for seven years. Before that I spent a decade working for some of the largest firms in the computer industry. I am, by any reasonable measure, computer-literate. One recent Sunday afternoon I thought I might pop into my office, copy this essay to a floppy disk, and work on it at home, where I was also caring for a child with chicken pox. In other words, I took the microcomputer industry up on its central promise: workers will be liberated from the tyranny of place. Able to function as parents and workers simultaneously, we will prosper along with our employers.

Here's what really happened. I promised my wife I'd be gone no more than thirty-five minutes, twenty-five for the drive to and from the university, ten to copy the file. As it happens, I am the last remaining member of the professional middle class without Microsoft Windows running at home. What I have is a 286 IBM clone running DOS and WordPerfect 5.1, equipment my last employer gave me when I left seven years ago. This setup was well on its way toward obsolescence when I acquired it. Were my students to learn that I wrote with a quill pen by the light of an oil lamp, they would think me hardly less quaint.

However, my reluctance to part with hard-earned money for a shiny new computer that I would use only as an abundantly outfitted typewriter did pose a small challenge. I would have to get the file from my office computer, a fancy Pentium workstation (courtesy of my current employer), to run on my ever-faithful home machine. Not a problem, I thought. I can easily transform the Microsoft Word file in my office to ASCII text, copy it to a 5¼-inch floppy disk, and read it into WordPerfect at home.

As we have all come to know, painfully at first and finally with resignation, when the subject is personal computers, things are not always as promised. (It has occurred to me more than once that the computer industry should have the honor of Iago and display these words boldly on every screen: "I am not what I am.") First I learned that my document was infected with the Word macro virus. No matter how I tried, Word would not let me transform it from a template (a term known to all Word users, happily ignored by most) to a text file. So I called a colleague who gave me what is known in the computer industry as a "workaround." A workaround is what you do when your machine is not running the way the manufacturer promised. By analogy, a workaround for faulty automo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bile brakes might be to open the door and drag your feet. In any case, my colleague is a clever fellow and the workaround did allow me to work around the handiwork of the disgruntled Microsoft employee who infected Word with the virus. Having transformed my essay into a generic text file, I was ready to copy it to a floppy and return home, safe in the knowledge that I could be both productive and parental.

Unfortunately, our former systems administrator, for reasons that must have made eminent sense to him, had disabled my A drive. But as I said earlier, I am computer-literate. Though annoying, a disabled drive is not catastrophic. I need only invoke a special setup routine to let Windows know that, in fact, there is a 5¼-inch floppy drive on my machine. But since this machine is a castoff from our department's lab, the systems administrator had, wisely, password-protected the setup routine. He had also, in the meantime, decamped for the vastly more remunerative pastures of the computer industry. In a word, he was unavailable and so was my machine. I returned home, nearly two hours after I had left, to an unhappy wife and a sicker child—and without the file.

This is not an isolated story. Anyone who has dealt with a microcomputer has a store of similar tales. There is another story here as well. Even if one is inclined to stick with the tried and true, the computer industry—and its minions across the land—will not permit it. By the time this article goes to press, the last computer in my department with a drive that accommodates 5¼-inch diskettes will have gone to wherever old computers go. My well-worn and well-loved 286 will then be an island cut off from the main, and I, its single inhabitant, will speak a language that is fast becoming extinct.

The price of computing equipment has dropped dramatically in recent years. For under $2,000 you can buy a microcomputer that processes millions of instructions per second and is equipped with a stunningly large memory and disk space. At that price we can all be equipped at the office, and most of us will choose to be equipped at home. As it happens, that $2,000 (plus a bit more for networking components) is the smallest slice of the great pie of microcomputer costs. The *Economist* cites a study by the Gartner Group, a respected consulting firm, that puts the annual cost of a microcomputer connected to a network at $13,200. Of this, only 21 percent goes to the purchase of hardware and software. Administrative costs absorb 36 percent. We have to pay all those people who come to our rescue, after all. This figure alone should slow down the headlong rush to outfit every desk on the planet with a microcomputer.

That administration costs more than the machine itself is not the biggest surprise. Recall my story. Just how much was my two hours worth? On the average, 43 percent of the cost of a microcomputer is consumed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in what Gartner calls "end-user operations." Just what are end-user operations? They are all those things one does with a computer in order to do the things one gets paid to do. This includes rearranging icons, coaxing disk drives into action, loading and setting up software, avoiding viruses, listening to Microsoft's music as you wait helplessly on hold for advice from someone in technical support who probably knows less than you do, and so on.

Though the Gartner Group has done us the service of quantifying those long hours spent mastering yet another Microsoft user interface, the effect of that time on worker productivity has been known for some years now. Many studies, including some done by the National Research Council and by Morgan Stanley, the New York investment bank, fail to indicate any correlation between productivity growth and information technology expenditures. Distressingly, the opposite appears to be true. As Thomas Landauer has pointed out in *The Trouble with Computers,* those industries that invested most heavily in information technology, with the exception of communications, seem to have the most sluggish productivity growth rates. Though one still could argue that schools and colleges should continue to teach courses in microcomputer literacy because microcomputer usage has grown like a fungus after a heavy rain, our time might be more profitably spent breaking the bad news to the public that pays the bills. In the process, we might also come to understand how a machine so patently clever as the microcomputer could have done the business world (outside of the computer industry itself) so little good.

Given the several thousand articles on computer literacy and the emerging inverse relationship between productivity growth and computer expenditures, it seems reasonable to ask just who does benefit from the computer literacy movement—and who pays for it. The commonsense answer is, "Students benefit." Well, common sense is right, but, as usual, only partially so. Students, of course, are served by learning how to use microcomputers. But the main beneficiaries are the major producers of hardware and software. The situation is really quite extraordinary. Schools and colleges across the country are offering academic credit to students who master the basics of sophisticated consumer products. Granted that it is more difficult to master Microsoft Office than it is to learn to use a VCR or a toaster oven, the difference is one of degree, not of kind.

The obvious question is why the computer industry itself does not train its customers. The answer is that it doesn't have to. Schools, at great public expense, provide this service to the computer industry free of charge. Not only do the educational institutions provide the trainers and the setting for the training, they actually purchase the products on which the students are to be trained from the corporations that are the primary beneficiaries of that training. The story is an old but generally unrecog-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nized one in the United States: the costs are socialized while the benefits are privatized.

I have described a bleak landscape in this essay. Let me summarize my observations:

Schools and universities purchase products from the computer industry to offer training that benefits the computer industry.

These purchases are both publicly subsidized through tax support and paid for by students (and their parents) themselves.

The skill imparted is at best trivial and does not require faculty with advanced degrees in computer science—degrees acquired, by and large, through public, not computer industry, support.

As the number of microcomputers in our schools has grown, the chance that something interesting might be done with them has decreased.

The stunning complexity of microcomputer hardware and software has had the disastrous effect of transforming every English professor, every secretary, every engineer, every manager into a computer systems technician.

For all the public subsidies involved in the computer literacy movement, the evidence that microcomputers have made good on their central promise—increased productivity—is, at the very least, open to question.

If my argument is at least partially correct, we should begin to rethink computing. The microcomputer industry has been with us for a decade and a half. We have poured staggering sums down its insatiable maw. It is time to face an unpleasant fact: the so-called microcomputer revolution has cost much more than it has returned. One problem is that microcomputers are vastly more complex than the tasks ordinarily asked of them. To write a report on a machine with a Pentium II processor, sixty-four megabytes of memory, and an eight-gigabyte hard disk is like leasing the space shuttle to fly from New York to Boston to catch a Celtics game. Though there are those who wouldn't hesitate to do such a thing if they could afford it (or get it subsidized, which is more to the point), we follow their lead at great peril. The computer industry itself is beginning to recognize the foolishness of placing such computing power on every office worker's desk. Oracle, the world's premier manufacturer of database management systems; Sun Microsystems, a maker of powerful and highly respected engineering workstations; and IBM itself are arguing that a substantially scaled-down network computer, costing under $1,000, would serve corporate users better than the monsters necessary to run Microsoft's products.

Please don't misunderstand. This is not a neo-Luddite plea to toss computers out the window. I am, after all, a computer science professor, and I am certainly not ready (as the militias in my part of the country put it) to get off the grid. Further, the social benefits of computing—from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

telecommunications to business transactions to medicine to science—are well known. This essay is simply a plea to think reasonably about these machines, to recognize the hucksterism in the hysterical cries for computer literacy, to steel ourselves against the urge to keep throwing money at Redmond and Silicon Valley.

Putting microcomputers in their place will also have a salutary effect on my discipline. We in computer science could then begin to claim that our field—like mathematics, like English literature, like philosophy—is a marvelous human creation whose study is its own reward. To study computer science calls for concentration, discipline, even some amount of deferred gratification, but it requires neither Windows 98, nor a 400-megahertz Pentium II processor, nor a graphical Web browser. Though I am tempted, I will not go so far as to say that the introductory study of computer science requires no computing equipment at all (though Alan Turing did do some pretty impressive work without a microcomputer budget). We do seem, however, to have confused the violin with the concerto, the pencil with the theorem, and the dancer with the dance.

I am afraid that we in computing have made a Faustian bargain. In exchange for riches, we are condemned to a lifetime of conversations about the World Wide Web. An eternity in hell with Dr. Faustus, suffering the torments of demons, would be an afternoon in the park by comparison.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Loren Eiseley

Excavating the Self

VIVIAN GORNICK

Man is himself, like the universe he inhabits . . . a tale of desolations. . . . But out of such desolation emerges the awesome freedom to choose—to choose beyond the narrowly circumscribed circle that delimits the animal being. In that widening ring of human choice, chaos and order renew their symbolic struggle—they contend for the destiny of the world.

—The Star Thrower

For Loren Eiseley the universe is not filled with loneliness, the universe *is* loneliness. The condition is elemental: into it we are born, out of it we fashion ourselves. But the isolation is an amazement: as much promise as threat. Within it, there exists choice. Self-creation is the privilege, not the obligation, of the race.

Afflicted with an abiding loneliness of his own, one he could never alleviate, Eiseley made remarkable use of that which would otherwise have driven him to despair. Living as he did with an enduring sense of isolation, he observed isolation on a grand scale and made of it his lasting subject. His lifelong preoccupation with man and the universe was an equivalent of Lewis Mumford's with man and the city.

Eiseley spent forty years looking at bones, animals, and oceans, with an instinctive sense of metaphor applied to all his findings—instinctive, and angled like a telescope: at once both distance-seeking and yet focused on clarity of image. His writing is memorable for the singular detachment he brings to large, poetic evocations of geologic time, unearthed civilizations, the evolutionary nature of all that lives. In his essays Eiseley is a voyager steering a narrow course that widens steadily into a largeness of consideration by no means always sanguine. The gaze of the

Vivian Gornick's newest book is a collection of critical essays called *The End of the Novel of Love*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man behind the words, however, is calm, open, unagitated—resolved upon integrating whatever comes into view. So successful is the merger between narrator and subject in these essays about the world—with or without dinosaurs, or flowers, or starfish—that any reader might justifiably conclude that the writer is himself a man long emerged from his own chaos, now working in a state of inner equilibrium.

The tone of the essays is the tone Eiseley meant to apply to the memoir he completed shortly before his death in 1977. He intended that this book, *All the Strange Hours*, would present its protagonist not intimately, but within a scope of consideration similar to the one he had applied all his working life as an anthropologist. He would treat himself much as he would any other specimen he might dig out (in fact, the memoir is subtitled *An Excavation*). Early family life would be sketched only broadly; sex, marriage, and friendship not at all. Neither would we learn much about the author as a figure in the world. We were to view him as a kind of prototypic being alive on the planet at this time, in this place. The book he actually wrote is remarkable because the writing welled up out of a place beyond the reach of conscious intent, and it rescued him repeatedly from his own defensiveness, taking the work ever more inward until the memoir did that astonishing and mysterious thing that good writing does: it achieved an interior life and became something larger than the sum of its parts.

Loren Eiseley was born in 1907 in Nebraska. His father was a decent man who read books and seemed to fail at almost everything he tried. His mother was profoundly deaf and had once been beautiful; deafness and anger led her to become a creature of guttural sound, wary and at bay. Her presence was lonely-making. His father loved him, but the love did not reduce the loneliness. Within himself, the boy turned away to the glorious emptiness before him, to the birds and animals, the fossils and desert striations he found out on the sunbaked Nebraska plain. Here, in this silence, he did not feel alone.

The father died; there was no money; Loren dropped out of school, left home at nineteen, and began to wander. "All over America men were drifting like sargasso weed in a vast dead sea of ruined industry," among them the young Loren Eiseley. The Depression suited him fine. Riding the rails, surviving in hobo encampments, enduring the brutishness of a world hung with the sign "Jobless men keep going"—all this confirmed him (even then) in his belief that "there is nothing more alone in the universe than man. . . . [Only] in rare and hidden moments of communion with nature, does man briefly escape his solitary destiny."

In his late twenties Eiseley broke out of the long cycle of poverty and wandering, returned to school, became an anthropologist with a strong talent for writing, went on to graduate school and a life in teaching and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

university administration. He wrote many books of essays and poetry, all meant to "excavate" the relationship between man and the animals, man and the elements, man and the universe, man and anything but people. Throughout his life Eiseley experienced himself as a solitary. It matters not that he was, in fact, married, and had friends, colleagues, and students in abundance; it matters only that this is how he saw himself. To be a man alone among men became the organizing principle of his inner life. As the years went on and the books piled up, he became persuaded that everything that he was had destined him for the company of the universe, not for human fellowship—and that was fine, just fine. When he sat down to write his memoir, he considered himself both knowing and at peace on that score. Yet the prose, almost from the start, strikes an acutely emotional note distinctly at odds with that measured consideration.

Not more than twenty pages in, Eiseley casually describes his mother as "paranoid, neurotic and unstable"—terms of description unalarming to the reader of modern memoir—but then, in an unexpected outburst, he writes:

> There will be those to say in this mother-worshipping culture that I am harsh, embittered. They will be quite wrong. Why should I be embittered? It is far too late. A month ago, after a passage of many years, I stood above her grave in a place called Wyuka. We, she and I, were close to being one now, lying like the skeletons of last year's leaves in a fence corner. And it was all nothing. Nothing, do you understand? All the pain, all the anguish. Nothing. We were, both of us, merely the debris life always leaves in its passing, like the maimed discarded chicks in a hatchery tray—no more than that. For a little longer I would see and hear, but it was nothing, and to the world it would mean nothing.

The passage is startling. The directness jars. The directness and the nakedness. It's the "Nothing, do you understand?" that does it. In that quivering insistence we feel the presence of a sixty-seven-year-old man whose thin skin is still stretched across an open wound.

A few pages later Eiseley describes a dinner with W. H. Auden, a great admirer of his work. The dinner goes badly. By his own admission, he has been feeling uncomfortable with the great poet, diminished somehow in his presence. Auden, aware of the stiffness between them, is chatting to set them at ease. He asks Eiseley, who is exactly his age, to name the earliest public event he remembers, and mentions, briefly, that in his case it was the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912. Eiseley replies by falling into an extended reverie over a prison break (also in 1912) that took place near his home, letting his voice go self-consciously "poetic" as he speaks ("He blew the gates with nitroglycerin. I was five years old . . . already old

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

enough to know one should flee from the universe but I did not know where to run. . . . There was an armed posse and a death. . . . We never made it"). The tale is long, self-dramatizing, and unmistakably competitive. Yet we are touched, not embarrassed, by it, because we've already been given a taste of the rawness inside the man.

To a considerable degree, the entire book is an ever-deepening clarification of these two passages. Chapter headings may read "The Rat That Danced," or "Toads and Men," or "The Coming of the Giant Wasps," but we are engaged by the man who told us more than he meant to tell himself when he rapped out "Nothing, do you understand?" and then related the story of his dinner with Auden. What that man is grappling with is the experience this memoir is wanting to shape.

It is in the chapters on the wandering years that we first meet the man who identifies with animals, not with people, and feel the weight and consequence of his grievance. In some of the best Depression writing you will ever read, Eiseley evokes the despairing antagonism of the time: a kind of starved, murderous haze that keeps drifting up from the middle of the socialized world. Tramping through some terrible little town in the California desert where the vagrant is the enemy ("Jobless men keep going"), he thinks, "If you turn backward you will find only shutters banging in the wind, smashed windowpanes, the eyes of strangers, or, worse, the eyes of those who know you so thoroughly they wish never to see you again. . . . The rules were very simple in that place . . . the citizen didn't count. All that mattered were the watchers who ate and slept, and the watched who were unsuccessful at either."

Once during this period a vicious brakeman tries to push him off a moving train. "He struck me across the face and pushed," Eiseley writes. "A thin hot wire like that in an incandescent lamp began to flicker in my brain. . . . 'Kill him, kill him,' blazed the red wire. 'He's trying to kill you.'" Hours later, in a hobo camp, he is asked about his swollen face. When he explains, the man who questioned him (as though taking his cue from Steinbeck) says, "Just get this straight. The capitalists beat men into line. Okay? The communists beat men into line. Right again? . . . Men beat men, that's all. That's all there is. Remember it, kid." Of this exchange Eiseley remarks with some irony, "That man, whose name I never knew . . . left all my life henceforward free of mobs and movements, free as only very wild things are both solitary and free." But the real conclusion of the story comes when Eiseley observes of himself that often, over the years, in trying to tell what he knows, he has felt that "the tale I had intended . . . had been lost in the incoherence of a split personality, the murderer who had not murdered but who carried a red wire glowing in his brain."

Of this man—the civilized writer with the red wire still glowing in his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brain—he speaks rarely and only indirectly. The indirection leads him into dark waters:

> Men should discover their past. I admit to this. It has been my profession. Only so can we learn our limitations and come in time to suffer life with compassion. Nevertheless, I now believe there are occasions when . . . to tamper with the past, even one's own, is to bring [on] that slipping, sliding horror which revolves around all that is done, unalterable, and yet which abides unseen in the living mind . . . [and makes] us lonely beyond belief.

He is speaking here of the unexpected consequences of one or two world-famous excavations, but of course that is not what he is speaking of at all. This far I go, the writing says, and no further.

So the memoir proceeds, from subject to subject—his own early digs, the writing of his books, his years as a university teacher and administrator, the archaeologists he has admired—relentlessly seeking detachment and poetic sentence-making, but repeatedly giving way to a kind of melancholy murk too compelling for the memoirist to ignore, too congealed for him to dispel.

In a memorable chapter called "Madeline," we are told of a cat Eiseley lived with in graduate school who, desperate for recognition, discovered a talent that made the students cheer: she could bow. The more they cheered, the more Maddy bowed. Soon she was bowing as though for her very life, and they were all, especially Eiseley, trapped by the cat's need for their applause: "She lived for it; one could not let her down, humiliate her, relegate her to her former existence. . . . More than once I gave up other things to serve as a substitute audience. For, you see, I had come to realize even then that Maddy and myself were precisely alike; we had learned to bow in order to be loved for our graceless selves."

The encounters with stray dogs—and they are many—go even deeper. Dogs Eiseley befriended fifty years ago on a moving train in the West, last year on the street in Philadelphia, yesterday in the ruins of a demolished campus building—one and all are evoked with such power and immediacy that the identification is unmistakable. The dogs are the mongrel in himself, vagrant and still at large within the accomplished seventy-year-old man.

Yet for all that he cannot or will not address openly, Eiseley never seems either dishonest or withholding. On the contrary, the incapacity is moving. Clearly, the silence within remains a torment and, for him, a proof of his own oddity.

Late in the book he invokes the memory of Edward Blyth, the unsung researcher whose brilliant work Darwin exploited, and to whose life

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

("You, too, were a solitary") Eiseley resonates. "Suppose," he writes across the century to Blyth, "we were seated, like the tramps we are, at a fire by the railroad. What would we say as the dark closed in—Men beat men, verbally or physically—is that the most of it?" The sentences lift themselves from the page; beneath them we feel Eiseley's lasting sense of marginality.

The final chapters are an astonishment. As Eiseley draws close to the present, it seems suddenly to matter that he hasn't known what to make of himself in relation to other people. At his mother's funeral he pleads inarticulately with his wife of forty years—a woman to whom he refers three times in passing, and only once by name—to reassure him that they have, indeed, come "the whole way." She does as she's asked, but her words are of no use to him. Anxiety now drives the language on, making it swell to allegoric proportions: there are talking cats, giant wasps, mythic struggles in a blinding, primeval snow.

Abruptly, Eiseley pulls himself together. In a satchel his mother left him, he finds a huge forgotten bone from his early diggings, an Ice Age bison forelimb that sits now on his desk. He lifts the bone, meditates on it, and, at the very last, tells us that whatever the conflicts have been about, this much he knows: "I did not care for taxonomic definitions, that was the truth of it. I did not care to be a man, only a being." And we believe him. We believe him because we have spent the last three hundred pages in the company of a man whose struggle with himself has been much in evidence. It's the struggle that makes him a trustworthy narrator. Even more in evidence has been his courage. It's the courage that makes the book.

Loren Eiseley was a man who opened his eyes nearly every morning of his life into a vast and etherizing depression ("a tale of desolations," indeed). Then he swung his legs over the side of the bed, stood up, walked across the room, sat down at his desk, and began to work ("in that widening ring of human choice, chaos and order renew their symbolic struggle"). That's courage; that's self-creation. That also, I believe, was the true find of the excavator who put what he knew in a container labeled "memoir" and sent it out into the world.

The memoirist has the same responsibility as the novelist and the poet—to shape a piece of experience. The question, inevitably, is: what is the experience, and where is it to be found? The answer: in whatever delivers the wisdom. *All the Strange Hours* is a remarkable book because as we read it, we can see Eiseley writing to frame the question. When he does, of course, it answers itself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Ups and Downs of Honor

EUGEN WEBER

The oldest poem in our Western tradition opens with a quarrel about honor. The Greeks, who have spent several years besieging Troy, take time off to sack a neighboring city. From the plunder, a girl, the daughter of the priest of Apollo, has been allocated to the Greek commander, Agamemnon, king of kings. When the girl's father comes to plead for her return, Agamemnon refuses the rich ransom he offers. So Apollo sends a plague upon the Greeks, and Agamemnon is forced to hand her over. To save face, he confiscates another captive maiden who has been bestowed upon Achilles, the greatest fighter among the Greeks. Achilles has a big ego and a quick temper, but he cannot resist, because Agamemnon can call on more men than he can. So he does the next best thing: he drops out of the siege and goes to sulk, while the rest of the Greeks get walloped.

Many have read the book or seen the movie, but few have fathomed that the function of this tragedy, as of many others, is to glorify and heroicize ugly motives and ugly deeds. If we look at it afresh, without the respect due to a classic, we will discover that the *Iliad*, chapter 1, presents two gang-leading thugs, Achilles and Agamemnon, facing each other down, trading threats and insults over loot and women, and that the whole poem turns on plunder and pride and the sport of killing.

Similar sentiments move another heroic figure, Roland—a reckless

Eugen Weber is the Joan Palevsky Professor of Modern European History at the University of California, Los Angeles. His most recent book is *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s*. An earlier version of this essay was presented as the Flora Levy Lecture in the Humanities at the University of Southwestern Louisiana.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

young fool who accepts combat at odds of ten to one; who refuses to call for help when only reinforcements can prevent annihilation; who sacrifices his men, his friends, and himself; and who endangers the interests of his lord and country in order to satisfy an ideal that even his best friend does not accept. Yet Roland's values were widely admired for centuries. It was of Roland that the minstrel sang to the troops of William the Conqueror before the Battle of Hastings, and it was to Roland that the Crusaders looked for inspiration, as did Pizarro's men in Peru as late as the early sixteenth century.

The real campaign that Charles the Great conducted south of the Pyrenees in 778, when Roland lost his life in a mountain ambush set by more-or-less-Christian Basques, was waged to support one Muslim prince against another; and Charles's and Roland's Franks destroyed not Muslim Saragossa but Christian Pamplona. *The Song of Roland* is no more a handbook of what we would call chivalry than the *Iliad* is. It shows no sense of sportsmanship, no fair play, no chivalrous treatment of opponents. Roland gloats about previous victims, he brags about what he has done, he boasts of what he's going to do, and he taunts his victims when he's through with them, just as Achilles drags Hector's corpse through the dust. Roland's vainglory brings to mind the bumptious dances that football players execute after sacking a quarterback. They are exhilarated, and they show it in their uncouth prancing.

George Fenwick Jones, to whose brilliant *Ethos of the Song of Roland* these pages owe a great deal, cites a quotation from Aristotle about young people that provides a clue to Roland at Roncesvalles, as well as to some football players: "They are passionate, hot-tempered, and carried away by impulse, and unable to control their passion. For owing to their ambition they cannot endure to be slighted, and they become indignant when they think they are being wronged. They are ambitious of honor, but more of victory; for youth desires superiority, and victory is a kind of superiority." Hope of fame and fear of shame, passion for victory and for superiority, apprehension of the shame of defeat—all these drive Roland, who is interested in public displays of courage because his honor depends on what other people think. And Roland is not alone.

In 1961, one of the great film epics of the Kennedy era presented Charlton Heston playing another hero—El Cid—as the embodiment of today's notion of nobility: a brave, patriotic Christian who battled fanatical Muslims from North Africa. In historical fact, Rodrigo Diaz, an eleventh-century figure, was first called *Sidi* (which means "lord" or "boss") by his Arabic-speaking friends, and he was no more Christian than his Muslim allies. Richard Fletcher's *Quest for El Cid* tells us that Diaz was a condottiere: a hard, harsh man interested only "in pay and plunder," who pillaged churches, despoiled women and children of property and legacies, broke promises, and hampered his king, Alfonso VI of Castile, in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the war against the Muslims. He did so because he had to avenge the loss of honor inflicted on him by one of the king's great vassals, so he ravaged the lands of his foes and shamed the Christian king. As for his relations with the fair sex, medieval Spanish treatments of the legend realistically focus on the alleged ladylove Ximena's efforts to preserve her patrimony from the warrior who threatened to seize it by right of conquest. Softer feelings were not part of the repertoire of eleventh-century gangsters.

Yet Rodrigo Diaz, the Sid, really was a virtuous knight, because *virtue* meant manliness—not righteousness or moral worth, but effective action. The closest we can get to the term *virtu* is power, strength—better still, force, as in "May the Force be with you!" And the virtuous Rodrigo, like the virtuous Roland, is *fier*, which means not just proud but, in that time, fierce, ferocious, as in Fierabras, the hero of a medieval romance who, well known for his frightful strength, could kill a man with one blow of his bare fist, just as Roland could cleave a pagan *and* his saddle in half with one blow of his sword.

If manly might is all, then mercy is a sign of weakness, ruthlessness is the concomitant of force, and the terror they inspire is mixed with admiration. Arrogant, turbulent, and dangerous, the *ferox* adolescents who terrorized Cicero's Rome or Tybalt's Verona were admired for their spirit and courage, feared for their reckless ferocity. This comes out in the German word *Ehrfurcht*: a compound of honor and fear, which we might translate as respect in the Mafia sense, but which the dictionary translates as reverence or awe.

Thus *honor*—in the sense that lasted for many centuries—is power, and the glory that comes from power, and the *fama*, or fame, that reflects a reputation for power. Infamy is the loss of public esteem that goes with losing power and reputation; and with infamy goes ignominy, literally losing your name—a good name that is important to the individual, to the lineage, to the clan. Name, fame, stand for personality, which was, in the most concrete sense, regarded as property. This is why actors, who had no stable personality, had no honor; why the code of Justinian marked them with infamy; and why Rousseau denounced the actor's art as counterfeiting. Honorable men had integrity: they assumed their birth, their kin, their role, and took the consequences.

But honor was usually reserved for the wellborn. Roland calls the traitor Ganelon *"culvert, malvais hom de put aire"*—vile man of base birth—and this is revealing because *culvert*, from *colibertus*, a freedman, becomes our coward, which is what you would expect from a lowborn fellow. Archbishop Turpin, on the other hand, is a *"chevaler de bon aire"*—a knight of good family, hence debonair. Turpin is a *gentilzhom*—a gentleman. The term derives directly from the Latin *genitus*, born, implying wellborn, of good stock; hence the gentleman is strong, handsome (the ill-born are ugly), and generous (*generosus* has the same root, the same

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sense). Humble folk, Virgil and Montaigne agreed, have a propensity for small-mindedness and fear. Pride may be a vice, but it keeps you from meaner courses. The vulgar are stingy, they are miserable (another term derived from Latin), and so they are miserly, whereas the rich (a word related to kingship and abundance) are powerful. Lack of wealth means lack of *virtu.* The poor are weak, shiftless, cowardly, literally losers to be scorned. The wealthy are strong enough to take from others and to have a large following attracted by success and largesse.

When Achilles and Agamemnon clash, the one with more and better soldiers has the upper hand. How do you get more and better soldiers? You pay them more and better. The very term *soldier* originally meant a mercenary who was paid a *solde,* a wage, in Roman gold coins called *solidi*—from which the English coin the shilling derived. The allegiance of one's soldiers depended on generosity. The Franks loved Roland because he gave them lots of loot—gold, silver, garments, mules. That is what war was really about—and often still is today in Africa and in the Balkans—because, as the Spanish used to say before they began to lose their wars, warfare is a quicker and more honorable way to wealth than trade. Trade takes time and patience; warfare is about pillage, robbery, and (ideally) fighting those who cannot fight back. The spoils of war subsidize yet another form of honorable behavior: magnanimity—great-heartedness, meaning the openhandedness that attracts valiant followers.

So honor is renown, glory, riches, power; but these have to be won and preserved by *valiance*—valor, bravery. And the temerity of Roland goes with stoutheartedness. The Latin for temerity, *estultie,* is easily confused with the Latin word for folly, *stultitia.* But the original popular sense of both terms survives in the Swiss Grisons usage of *matti* (madmen), applied to wild young men and village bullies, and in the Spanish *loco* (crazy), used as a term of praise or self-praise for gangland heroes. It survives also in the sobriquet of a famous Western gunfighter, James Butler Hickock, whom we remember as Wild Bill Hickock because of his admirably impetuous actions and reactions. No wonder that when George Armstrong Custer, Hickock's almost exact contemporary, led a cavalry charge near the Little Bighorn River from which not one man came out alive, the *New York Herald* extolled the charge as "mad" and praised the catastrophic Custer's "strong impulses, greathearted friendship and bitter enmities, nervous temperament, undaunted courage, will and determination."

The Song of Roland shows little respect for moderation and much for recklessness. Oliver counsels prudence, but Roland is the hero. In the Middle Ages, in the Wild West, or in today's inner cities, prowess must be proved over and over again. Reckless bravado is as characteristic of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cinematic cowboys as it was of knights, and indeed the typical showdown in films like *High Noon* looks much like the knightly joust.

There have always been societies, and there are societies today, that respect and reward Roland's kind of honor. And the reason for this is not mere foolish romanticism. When insecurity reigns, a temper that is short and ferocious is an asset. Security rests on the capacity to make yourself feared, and a man who demonstrates readiness to repay a slight or injury (real or imagined) is feared, appreciated, and honored. In the villages of eighteenth-century Languedoc, as in the Old West, a reputation for *honnêteté,* personal honor, rested on being feared: "for it is on this that, in the absence of peaceful guarantees, the true security of the strong rests." That is precisely what the American sociologist Ruth Horowitz tells us in an essay called "Honor and Gang Violence," which makes very clear that gangs base their operations on the ideology of honor, just as the Mafia does.

Status, explains Horowitz, "is achieved in part through the deference and appreciation others show a person about his fighting skills." Another sociologist, Tricia Rose, remarks that "the hard invincible young black male who has no chinks in his armor, who is always ready for battle, grandly refusing most forms of emotional vulnerability, is an asset in today's urban zones." The world of honor is comparative, hence competitive, as each champion, whether Achilles, Roland, or a gang member in the 'hood, strives to outdo the others. Gang history, like ancient and less ancient history, is a litany of competitive aggression that challenges, confirms, or alters authority and status—the precarious pecking order that we call social or international hierarchy. So none of this is new.

In the *Volsung Saga,* a Viking kills a king in battle, and the bard tells us that "Helgi now saw his status increase considerably by having killed so powerful a king." Status pays off. *Praise* and *price* have the same Latin root—*pretium*—which means value, or wages, or reward, and which could, in Middle French and English, mean all these things as well as esteem and honor. All of which makes sense: high reputation earned high rewards, beginning with high wages.

The twelfth-century romance *Fulk Fitzwarine* has Fulk and his brothers "cross the sea to seek honor and distinction." Maurice Keen's *Chivalry* reminds us that in the spring of 1177, about the same time as the fictional Fitzwarines were setting off on their voyage, a couple of young men from the household of King Henry II of England (the husband of Eleanor of Aquitaine) went into partnership to attend every tournament they could and share the profits. They crossed the sea as Fulk had done, and in the next ten months they captured and put to ransom 103 knights. So they made money. Even more important, their record caught the eye of powerful patrons who could provide pensions and preferment. In 1180, when one of the two young champions, William Marshal,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Guillaume le Marechal, fell out of favor with his Angevin king, he got offers of employment from two of the greatest lords of the age: the count of Flanders and the duke of Burgundy. But he resisted temptation and died earl of Pembroke, wealthy and honored.

Thus martial prowess is good for the gallant knight, the *preux;* and *prouesse,* the prowess that evokes the respect made up of honor and fear, also means utility and profit. *Preux* derives from the Latin *prodesse*—being serviceable or useful. And prowess is both: prowess is profitable. It also (this is important) helps to economize on effort, because a reputation for prowess keeps people off your back, protects your person, your property, your power. Hobbes pointed out that "honor consists only in the opinion of power"—meaning the opinion that other people have of your power and of you. Which is why *honte*—shame—follows defeat, and why being bested in a contest that is always about more than sport hurts your honor.

Roland explains that if he does not fight he will be *honi,* which means both defeated and scorned. There is no honor in losing. The heroine of Corneille's *Le Cid* points out with perfect logic that, however brilliant her lover's glory (that is, his reputation), when people hear that he is dead they will believe he was defeated:

> For all Rodrigo's glory whilst alive and kicking,
> Once they have heard he's dead they'll know he took a licking.

Le Cid was staged in 1637, but this view of honor had begun to change in the late Middle Ages, because ransom became increasingly important, hence morally acceptable to both winners and losers. The emblematic date for a process that had been going on at least since the Hundred Years' War is 1525, when Francis I, king of France, defeated and captured at Pavia, writes back to his mother not, as is popularly believed, *"Tout est perdu fors l'honneur"* (All is lost save honor), but, more significantly, "Of all things, all that I have left is honor, and my life which is safe." So now you could keep your honor *and* your life, if you could afford it. And if surviving defeat no longer meant infamy, that was because several processes had been at work to rationalize the transition.

The Christian church had always argued that honor was associated with the sin of pride and was thus unchristian. But this argument never got very far, even among churchmen: witness the combative Archbishop Turpin, and even Cardinal Richelieu. God was an awesome liege lord more at home in the Old Testament than the New. He was expected to reward his vassals, avenge their wrongs, and help them kill their foes. Christian charity offered opportunities for ostentatious magnanimity, but Christian humility reeked of humiliation. It was not the encouragement or threats of God, saints, or clergy that tamed warrior predators, but the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pressure and cajoling of more forceful authorities. Princes trying to impose order and discipline on unruly subjects had been working to discriminate between legitimate and illegitimate violence, with the former strictly in their hands and those of their agents. The pursuit of personal honor challenged the ruler's power, hence *his* honor; it threatened the welfare of the realm, as in the nobles' impetuous charge at Agincourt; and it destabilized the law and order of both prince and state. That's what *The Three Musketeers* is about. It was important to harness the hero to the interests of the *patria,* the fatherland, and to the interests of the crown. Hence when Corneille staged *Le Cid* in the days of Louis XIII and Richelieu, he enlisted Rodrigo's unruly passions in a more patriotic task: defending Spain against her enemies.

As for the king's honor itself, it learned to answer to allegedly higher standards that also put the state first. That is why princes could break treaties, when honorable men could not break their word. That is why Francis first gave Charles V, his captor at Pavia, his word of honor as a knight and king to carry out the Treaty of Madrid, then broke his word, and, finally, eluded Charles's challenge to a duel. This was not the sort of record that would be appreciated by the man who had dubbed Francis a knight ten years before Pavia, after the victory at Marignan. Bayard, who died shortly before his king was captured, was, as his fellows dubbed him, the *Chevalier sans peur et sans reproche* (the knight without fear and without reproach). *Reproche* in the *Song of Roland* means the blame or shame that follows upon cowardice, or upon defaulting on a promised ransom, or upon otherwise breaking the word you have pledged. And Chaucer, in the *Canterbury Tales,* makes a point of letting us know that his "parfit gentil knight" was very keen on keeping his word. By this standard, Francis could not have taken part in a tournament, or belonged to a noble order of chivalry, or mixed as an equal with his peers. By the standards of Roland's Franks (and remember that *franc* meant free), Francis after Pavia was *caitif:* from the Latin *captivus*—unfree and hence a wretch.

Since those times, however, lawyers had learned to argue that princes must operate by different standards from those affecting other men, and humanists had related honor to moral considerations rather than to manly and mundane virtues. Agrippa d'Aubigné, the Protestant knight, failed to prevent his prince, Henry IV, from selling his soul for Paris. Paris was worth a mass. But was it worth surrendering your religion, hence your honor, and becoming a *recréant?* D'Aubigné had to admit that "our kings have learnt to Machiavellize." The more detached Montaigne, whom Henry admired, knew that fortune was inconstant, values multiple, inflexible principles misleading. Montaigne suggested that honor lay not necessarily in winning, but in fighting a good fight. This is just what Pierre de Coubertin said three hundred years later, and Grantland Rice

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

repeated soon thereafter: what mattered was "not that you won or lost, but how you played the game." Those who won still wrote the rules, but by the sixteenth century, even more by the seventeenth, kings could claim to place national interest above *reproche,* and intellectuals like Montaigne helped to rationalize their efforts by shifting honor from public regard to personal self-esteem.

To these changes there was yet one more strand, and it concerns people long considered less than honorable. The cascade of contempt between social groups was endless. There was, of course, no honor for servants or actors or hangmen; nor for the physically disadvantaged, or those belonging to the wrong religious persuasion, like the Jews. But there was none either for laborers and carters, carriers and linen weavers, washerwomen, jugglers, bailiffs, or constables. German master artisans who sought admission to a guild had to swear that they descended from honorable parents—free men, not serfs—who were themselves not the offspring of priests, or bastards, or executioners, nor of millers, barbers, bath attendants, minstrels, skinners, or tanners. Some of these exclusions are mysterious, some less so. Bailiffs and millers appear in such lists because they were associated with mean and crooked tricks; bath attendants because bathhouses doubled as brothels; skinners, tanners, and barbers because they belonged to unclean professions, as did executioners (and washerwomen). Finally, some oaths mention not being descended from Wends, a native tribe of the German-Polish borderlands. This would be like a nineteenth-century American being required to swear that he has no Indian blood: a reminder that ethnic identity and ethnic slurs were no less familiar in thirteenth-century Germany than they were in biblical Palestine, in ancient Greece, or in early modern Spain. One could be despised by one's betters as peasant or artisan, and derive satisfaction from despising inferiors even less honorable than oneself.

Courts of justice, even though they recognized honor as an essential value, refused to consider it in contests between persons of low extraction. From the viewpoint of magistrates on the eve of the French Revolution, what brought disgrace to people of high estate would barely attract notice among the lower orders. But ambition takes no account of birth, and as early as the fourteenth century, Piers Plowman sneered that "soapsellers and their sons for silver are made knights." This, of course, continued to be true: witness the career of Sir William Hesketh Lever, who founded Lever Brothers (today's Unilever) on soap and detergents, and ended up Lord Leverhulme. By the seventeenth century, similar tales of social promotion had already provoked the express approval of that relentlessly rational philosopher Thomas Hobbes: "Riches are honorable because they are power. Poverty, dishonorable." Racine held similar views: "Without money, honor is mere malady."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Henceforth, what used to be an adjunct of honor could become a title to honor. Bourgeois and tradesmen aspired to the honorability hitherto ascribed only to warriors and the wellborn. *The Perfect Tradesman* of the seventeenth century refers to honor (and to honoring bills of exchange); a German Jewish tradeswoman of the same century seeks "wealth and honor" for herself and her children; and so do members of the liberal professions, especially men of law, who insist that for their services they should receive not *pay*, which is demeaning, but *honoraries*. In 1671, the prince of Condé, cousin of Louis XIV and one of his great captains, offers the king a splendid dinner in his castle at Chantilly. Condé's steward and chef, Clément Vatel, is shamed because the roast is short at a couple of tables and, worse, because the fresh fish has not arrived in time and no banquet is complete without a fish course. "I have lost my honor," says Vatel. "This is a disgrace that I shall not survive." He goes to his room, props his sword against a panel, and skewers himself three times just as the fish reaches the kitchen door. Condé weeps over his corpse, and the name of Vatel is forever engraved on France's gastronomic roll of honor.

The seventeenth century is when the word *virtue* begins its evolution toward what it means today, and when *honesty*, which in Middle English and early modern French was equivalent to honor (it had the same Latin root), starts to acquire the banal bourgeois meaning we accept today. In this view, honorability becomes respectability: a reputation for fair dealing, honoring your contracts, paying your debts. It can now be described, as Jeremy Bentham put it, as "a kind of fictitious object of property." No wonder that in Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*, bankruptcy is presented as "the most dishonorable action of all those that can dishonor a man"; or that the aged Gustave Flaubert ruined himself to save the family name from the shame of his nephew-in-law's bankruptcy. Those were the days, perhaps; but not the days of Roland. Or of D'Artagnan.

This bourgeois version of honor, however important, never attracted much attention, let alone sympathy, among intellectuals or opinion makers. The values of *The Three Musketeers* continued to be more popular than the values of *The Perfect Tradesman*, and, in the age of enlightened despots, Montesquieu's man of honor, like Homer's, still placed his personal honor above the interests of his country or his prince.

Then came such prophets of the new age as Rousseau and Robespierre, who would allow no disagreement between society and its members that could not be resolved by society in its own favor. Licit violence would be a monopoly of the state. Forcing men to be free meant forcing them also to be free from archaic traditions. The Revolution thus tried to eliminate what Robespierre dismissed as feudal extravagance, a category that included duels as affairs of honor. As it turned out, though, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Revolution was also about obtaining *access* to feudal extravagance. The Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars confirmed the old ideas of heroism and swashbuckling and honor; and the egalitarian principles of a revolution that allowed everybody access to what had been aristocratic privilege meant that all Frenchmen now had the right to duel.

Englishmen, who had long asserted the free man's right to maintain his honor, hence to duel, were turning against what was increasingly denounced as a crude, murderous, ruffian activity; and according to V. G. Kiernan's *The Duel in European History,* English schools encouraged boxing as "an innocent mode of settling disputes" that still preserved "the sense of honor and spirit and gallantry." But the nineteenth-century French went into dueling as Americans have gone into jogging—with the editorial staffs of monarchist and republican newspapers challenging each other en masse; with George Sand calling out Alexandre Dumas over the chastity of the duchesse de Berri; and with an apparently sane bourgeois like Victor Schoelcher, the man most responsible for the abolition of slavery in French colonies, having the propensity, when serving in his father's shop, "to challenge customers who perversely carped at the price of his wares."

Dueling in this new era soon became a form of conspicuous consumption and thus a way of showing off, which meant that it could be replaced by other self-promoting activities. A right accessible to all loses value. Honor, so long concerned with serious things—survival, status, significant rewards—was relegated to frivolous encounters in which serious interests were seldom at stake. An authoritative French treatise called *Point d'Honneur,* published in 1920, admitted that duelists ran the risk of appearing ridiculous because duels had become "a form of publicity." The encounter "fought" in 1958 between the dancer Serge Lifar and his impresario, the marquis de Cuévas, over a ballet bore this out. So did a case described by V. G. Kiernan: in 1985, two men being tried in Edinburgh for armed robbery invoked their right (never formally abolished in Scotland) to have their case tried by battle against the Queen's champion. The court decided that the right invoked was no longer valid but that, in any case, John and Paul Burnside had forfeited their right to trial by battle when they failed to throw down a white glove before their accusers.

Thus dueling slowly declined into absurdity; and so, on the whole, did considerations of honor and dishonor. The legal profession, for example, which had been much concerned with the nobility of its calling, found other fish to fry. In 1908, the American Bar Association's *Canons of Professional Ethics* had bound lawyers to use only "fair and honorable means." In 1969, the ABA junked the *Canons* because it was "designed for an earlier era" and full of "quaint expressions of the past."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One of the quaint expressions that it dropped was "honor." Perhaps the ABA had assimilated the spirit of Emerson's sally: "The louder he talked of his honor, the faster we counted our spoons."

The same depreciation can be observed in public functions, which had been described as "honors" since late Roman times. Members of Parliament had been called "honorable," as our congressmen are called today, and the French had taken over the English usage. The French have sensibly dropped this, and in English-speaking countries we no longer attach meaning to the usage. We know that, as Montesquieu warned, honor is easily placed in contradiction with honors, and that one can be covered in infamies and dignities at the same time.

So the intermediate, or civil, notion of honor seems to have run its course. Evidence and public belief suggest that it has gone out of date; and it has done so, in part, because the geographical and social mobility that we enjoy help to devalue lineage and reputation. Mobility affords escape from your clan's *fama* or *infamia*, as from your own. Our forebears knew that recognition affects infamy as it does fame. They were suspicious of nomadism and nonentity because, as a seventeenth-century Dominican friar explained, "obscure folk" were "able to conceal their origins by moving from one place to another," the better to deceive past and present neighbors. In mass societies, the forest hides the trees; in cities, anonymity conceals individuals and their status. But honor goes with recognition, whether of birth or of fame.

The Latin term *nobilis* originally meant known, well known, hence necessarily recognizable. Nobles were easy to know, and so were the ignoble. In localized cultures and societies, the famous and infamous were recognized at once, and steps could be taken to see that infamy would be hard to flee. Sixteenth-century France, Germany, Bohemia, Poland, and no doubt other places produced defamatory texts and pictures designed to publicize the dishonor of individuals who defaulted after having pledged their honor. Today, such shortcomings don't qualify for Most Wanted lists. Inevitably, as Ben Jonson made one of his characters declare, "Contempt of fame begets contempt of virtue"—meaning, we know, contempt of honor. True in Jonson's seventeenth century, this is still true today, especially in realms well known to those who read newspapers and watch television.

The period during which a few Western societies managed to persuade themselves that their security was assured as long as law and order were guaranteed by that idealized monopolist of violence—the state—has proved brief. What is coming back is the original, violent, practical model that a lot of reasonable, law-abiding people had come to consider as obsolete as chastity. These days, over growing patches of what had slowly, painfully, precariously become a civilized world, older and more primitive conditions are returning. "Things fall apart; the center cannot

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hold"; the authority of what we call authorities is questioned or ignored; bodies and institutions that are supposed to secure security contribute to insecurity—either by failing to act or, in countries where corruption is prevalent, by effectively erasing the line between criminals and police.

That is where, that is when, the codes and the mentality of old-fashioned honor re-emerge to dictate principles of conduct. Retaliation looks more effective than reprieve. Experience teaches that if you give way, more people push you. The logic of violence is crude but simple: violent reaction against transgression deters others who might follow suit. And there's little evidence that litigation affords a better chance of justice or satisfaction than forceful direct action does.

As in the late Roman Empire, as in the early Middle Ages, existing political, legal, and economic structures, when not inoperative, ignore you or betray you. Where authority is absent or alien or oppressive, who can redress your grievances? The only safeguard for property, for self, for self-respect, lies in yourself, in your protective associations, or in the patronage of a powerful figure.

The language that we work with can mislead us. We talk of *norms,* but where the norms of a given civilization have become abnormal, conforming to them has to be counterproductive. One can see this in a novel widely admired a generation ago, Giuseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard.* It describes nineteenth-century Sicily, where the cultivated nobleman is fated for extinction and the future rests with the Mafioso man of honor, dismissed as "one of those violent cretins capable of any havoc." But cretins capable of havoc are feared and respected, as berserkers once were in Norse society. The *New York Times* recently quoted a parole officer describing a juvenile offender: "He would always act first and think about his actions later." What the parole officer failed to mention was that in the offender's world, where danger lurks along with rival thugs to whom life is nothing, impulsiveness is a sound instinct and brutal alacrity can preserve life.

It was so in Roland's day, when to be *isnel,* kin to the German *schnell*—quick, prompt to act—was an attribute of bravery, and temerity was a manly virtue. And it was still so in early twentieth-century California, where the *San Francisco Chronicle* (September 21, 1924) greeted Wyatt Earp's visit with the title: "Terror of Evildoers is Here; Alive Because He Was Quick with Trigger." The German analogue of *estultie*—temerity—is *stolto,* which has given us the English stout, as in stouthearted, and the German *stolz*—proud. Pride, stoutheartedness, and temerity seem to go together. They certainly do so in Wilbur Cash's *Mind of the South,* where unreconstructed southerners are described as "fiercely self-assertive and sensitive and inordinately resentful of slights and snubs . . . full of the chip-on-the-shoulder swagger of a boy [who] would knock hell out of whoever dared to cross him." That fits the boys in the 'hood just as it fit

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the boys around Troy. Virtue consists of action, and the reward of action, provided you survive, is the honor, the *Ehrfurcht,* that continues to acknowledge effective terror.

We are back in the realm of the *Iliad,* the *Odyssey,* and *Roland,* a realm of small communities and face-to-face relations in hostile surroundings, where men prey and plunder as much for prestige as for material gain, where bands of young warriors like those that Tacitus described in ancient Germania—gangs held together by interest in booty, hope of fame, and fear of shame—gather around a leader selected or self-selected for enterprise and ferocity. Material conditions, appropriate ideological codes, and shortage of alternatives explained it then and explain it now.

"The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." Yeats wrote this after the First World War and during the Irish civil war, but his words apply to other darkling ages when other barbarian gangs destabilized decaying civilizations; and they apply as well to the centuries of convalescence from chaos, when expedients were being turned into rules once more to create the norms that we were brought up to think of as normal. The rules are seeping out again, aggression is reasserting itself as the better part of valor, and a new kind of honor that looks disturbingly like the old kind of honor is seeping back in.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kant's Friend Al

LAURENCE LERNER

There are things; and there is the Thing-in-itself,
The Ding-an-sich. Things are everywhere.
We touch them, chew them, stumble, knock them over,
Make them up out of when and where

And the jumble of sense: the green and sticky
Gnarled and noisy, hot red intricate mess.
Within this tangled forest things emerge
Constructed by us,

By our transcendental reasoning. Things. We too
Are things to the others, hacking their way
And catching glimpses. But the Ding itself
Keeps disappearing. No one can say

"Here it is," pick it up, shake its hand
Or offer it a drink. Our transcendental cup
Can't hold the liquor that it needs;
And all our coaxing will not make it stop.

It will yield only to transcendent reasoning
Which touches nothing, which is deaf and blind
Weightless and anaerobic. The transcendental
Enters the forest, looking for Dame Kind.

And Al makes all the difference. Al can see
And feel the bark, the thorns, the gnarled green tree;
While far off, following its luminous nose,
The wandering Ding through the forest goes.

Laurence Lerner, retired Edwin Mims Professor of English at Vanderbilt University, is the author, most recently, of *Angels & Absences: Child Deaths in the Nineteenth Century*. He is also the author of nine volumes of poetry and three novels.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Laura Riding

A Modernist Puzzle

VICTOR M. CASSIDY

What are we to make of Laura Riding? This distinctively modern poet is little read today, rarely taught, and almost never anthologized. Until recently her prose had been out of print for decades. Riding produced most of her life's work—eleven volumes of poetry, nine of prose—between 1926 and 1939. At the age of forty, when most writers are just hitting their stride, she married and renounced poetry altogether. In the final decade of her long life, she reissued some of her books with fresh introductions. Since her death in 1991, more reprintings, previously unpublished poems, a collaborative volume on language called *Rational Meaning*, a biography, and a book-length critical study have appeared. In October of 1998, Cornell University was the site of a symposium—titled "Laura (Riding) Jackson and the Promise of Language"—that opened a three-month exhibition of documents and photographs from the papers she willed to the university. For the first time, we can examine her work in biographical and critical context.

Riding's output included essays and criticism, short stories, novels, memoirs, and, most important, poetry. Contemporary poets admired her skill with language, and several, including W. H. Auden, were influenced by her. Writing in *The Review* in 1970, the poet Roy Fuller called Riding "one of the most intellectually gifted writers of the century," noting that few of her beneficiaries had acknowledged their debts to her. "I judge my poems to be things of the first water as poetry," Riding herself wrote in 1970, adding that her verse had "served as a new primer of poetic linguis-

Victor M. Cassidy is a Chicago-based writer whose work has appeared in the *New Criterion*, *Art Net*, and other publications.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tics for many poets [and] a source, more and more unidentified, of new poetic sophistication."

In the preface to her *Collected Poems,* Riding defined a poem as "an uncovering of truth of so fundamental and general a kind that no other name besides poetry is adequate except truth." Poets, she declared, achieve superior insights into human character by knowing and examining themselves. Riding thus found her subject matter in herself, rather than drawing on the humanistic tradition of Europe, as did Auden, Eliot, Pound, and others of her time. Her best poems transcend place, historic circumstance, and individual experience.

In her preface, Riding called her work a "record of how . . . existence in poetry becomes more real than existence in time—more real because more good, more good because more true." Believing that the quality of a poem is related to the author's moral uprightness, she sought the "good existence" through her work. She was spiritual and missionary without being religious.

Riding maintained that language can be intensified in poetry so that each word projects its fullest meaning. Her style makes formal devices unnecessary. "Beyond" is an example:

> Pain is impossible to describe
> Pain is the impossibility of describing
> Describing what is impossible to describe
> Which must be a thing beyond description
> Beyond description not to be known
> Beyond knowing but not mystery
> Not mystery but pain not plain but pain
> But pain beyond but here beyond

To convey the sensation of throbbing pain she uses repetitive phrasing, but eschews image, rhyme, and metaphor. She abstracts both language and experience. By eliminating everything that smacked of rhetoric from her work, Riding came as close as anyone did to the modernist ideal of purified poetic diction.

Acknowledging that her verse makes heavy demands on the reader, Riding (in *Collected Poems*) told how Saint Francis of Assisi responded when a follower objected to the austerity of his rule. "Francis ," she wrote, " . . . affirmed that the Rule must be observed 'literally, literally, literally, without gloss, without gloss, without gloss.'" Riding commands: "So read, so exist. It is less difficult to read or exist well than to read or exist ill."

Though her credo is impressive, Riding removes so much of the pleasurable from verse—musicality, color, allusion, metaphor—that she dries it out. Her idiom is so minimal that some of her poems, like "Sunday," make no sense.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sky scanned the mind and found behind
Holes in the mind, more mind behind,
Clouds to provide appearances of thought.

"Dear Sister!" it cried,
"One kiss!"

The bland outrage
Spread over both as one,
Whispering "This is heaven."

"Oh, no," said the populations
Getting out of bed into slippers,
"What lovely weather!
To-day is Sunday!"

This poem seems satirical, but its meaning is obscure. Does the sky ask the clouds for a kiss? Why does "bland outrage spread over both as one"? Is the kiss an outrage? Can outrage be bland? What do kissing and outrage have to do with holes in the mind? Why do "the populations" say "Oh, no" as they put on their slippers? How does the kiss of sky and cloud make lovely weather? And what does all this have to do with Sunday?

Collected Poems is full of exhausting riddles of this sort. Some go on for pages. The reader struggles to find the rewarding poems in Riding's wildly uneven body of work.

To understand the themes of her poetry, we must know something about her life. Idealistic and vulnerable, she was a social misfit who could not accept limitations and would not let herself be happy for long. She was fortunate to find a lover-companion who gave her freedom to write without money worries. But she expected instant success, refused to learn from her mistakes, responded defensively to criticism, and isolated herself. When she could no longer explain away her failures, she fled into obscurity, spending the later years of her long life raging at her enemies from her Florida bungalow.

She was born Laura Reichenthal in New York City in 1901. Her father was an impoverished tailor and petty tradesman whose business failures forced his family to live in twelve cities in roughly ten years. Politically radical, Nathan Reichenthal saw Laura as a kindred spirit, taught her Marx, and wanted her to become an American Rosa Luxemburg.

At fifteen Laura renounced politics to become a writer. Bitter quarrels with Nathan ensued. She left home, moved in with her half-sister, and began to reinvent herself as "Laura Riding." She would later say that poetry let her create an alternative world where she felt normal and at home—a refuge "where the fear of speaking in strange ways could be left behind."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Enrolling at Cornell in 1918, Laura studied literature and wrote poems. In November 1920 she married Louis Gottschalk, her history instructor, and left college. At the University of Illinois, in Urbana, and then at the University of Louisville, Laura tried halfheartedly to be a proper faculty wife. Early in 1922, she suddenly reappeared in the Cornell dormitories, telling puzzled friends that she was convalescing from an illness. She showed her former classmates how to use cosmetics, which no respectable woman wore in those days, and talked murkily about sex. The Gottschalks' physical separation was the first public sign of trouble between them. They divorced in 1925.

Laura Riding Gottschalk had been "discovered" by *The Fugitive,* a Nashville literary journal that accepted twenty-one of her poems between 1923 and 1925. The editors, who referred to themselves as the Fugitives, included Donald Davidson, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren. Laura won a one-hundred-dollar prize for the best poem published in 1924. In Nashville she read before a Fugitive gathering but was not a social success. After her divorce she moved to New York and lived in Greenwich Village. She worked as a publicity writer, placed her verse in magazines, and found a publisher for her first book of poetry.

In 1925 Robert Graves noticed one of her poems ("The Quids") and wrote to her from England. He invited Laura to join him and his family in Egypt, where Graves was to teach at Cairo University. She accepted. Her attentive care of the four Graves children ingratiated her with Nancy Nicholson, Graves's wife. But Graves's marriage was failing. Sickly and malcontent, Nancy had proposed "dis-marriage," suggesting that she and Robert cohabit without mutual obligations. Weary of her complaints, Graves longed for a "muse" to inspire him. With her striking blue eyes, porcelain complexion, and limitless energy, Laura seemed heaven-sent. She became his muse, his literary partner, and his lover. Nancy knew of the affair from the start and saw it as a deliverance. For a time the ménage à trois seemed to work. Soon Laura, Robert, and Nancy were calling themselves "the Trinity."

Graves and Riding both gained from their literary alliance. When they met, Graves was a promising poet who had not yet recovered from combat in World War I. He wanted to worship a woman and be ruled by one. Laura was there to oblige. Decisive, efficient, tidy, and ferociously ambitious, she took Graves in hand, helped clarify his thinking, and even worked at reforming his character. He loved her passionately and recorded gratefully that she "glowed with a sort of light" in their early days together. For her sake Graves forsook his wife, neglected his children, withdrew from his parents and siblings, and ruptured friendships.

Laura profited most from the partnership. Graves knew literature better than she did and taught her a great deal, a debt she never acknowledged. He was a lucid, graceful writer who improved her work and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

got it published, though her books lost money and her poems and essays were often rejected by literary journals. With Graves supporting her, Laura spent almost all her time writing. She was dependent on him and well aware of it. Using his connections, he had lifted her into England's literary elite. Without him she had nowhere to go.

Unsure of her own gifts, and socially insecure in London, Laura created a self-defensive persona. Stressing her uniqueness and independence, she argued that the full meaning of her work eluded most people because they had pedestrian minds. In her criticism she refused to praise any living writer or to concede any influence or assistance.

Riding and Graves were astonishingly productive. By the end of 1926 they had completed two collaborations: *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* and *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies.* Laura had written most of the book that became *Contemporaries and Snobs,* a volume of criticism. She also worked on essays that would appear in 1928 in *Anarchism Is Not Enough.*

A Survey of Modernist Poetry, a "word-by-word collaboration" by Laura Riding (senior author) and Robert Graves (junior author), argues the case for modernism in verse and defends the authors' poetic practice. Writing from the poet's perspective, they contend that most readers of verse want something soothing that can be grasped at a glance; modernist poetry seems difficult only to mentally lazy people. To demonstrate modernist practice, they explicate "Sunset," an E. E. Cummings poem, and hilariously "de-modernize" it by inserting padding and prettified verbiage that Cummings would never have used. Next they suggest that Cummings's basic idea, a poem about a sunset, is so trite that what he actually did was to make up a bad poem and "modernize" it by throwing out the rubbish. For a truly modern-minded poet, they argue, "there is no 'other poem'; there is only the poem which he writes."

Riding and Graves scorned such movements as Imagism because they emphasized style. "Authentic 'advanced' poetry of the present day . . . is concerned with a reorganization of the matter . . . rather than the manner of poetry," they say. Technique is no longer how a poem is presented to a reader, but the way it corresponds in every respect to the poem's own governing meaning.

The most famous part of *A Survey* is a word-by-word explication of Shakespeare's Sonnet 129, "Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame." The authors demonstrate that Shakespeare's emendators violated his intentions by superfluously punctuating his sonnet. Instead of reading the poem in historical perspective, as a contemporary critic would have done, Riding and Graves seek Shakespeare's meaning in his original words. Although they did not invent close textual analysis, Riding and Graves revived interest in it. After reading their chapter on Shakespeare, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

young English critic William Empson was persuaded that all poetry has multiple meanings. In *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, he declared that the critic's task is to sort out and explain such ambiguities. Empson's book popularized careful study of literary texts and became a cornerstone of the New Criticism, which dominated literary studies for more than a generation.

In *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies*, Riding and Graves claim that most anthologists violate the integrity of poetry by jumbling together verse from different eras, mutilating and mispunctuating individual works, and choosing poems so as to advance inspirational, patriotic, or other nonliterary goals. Conscientious anthologists gather and present hard-to-find material, the authors insist.

Riding and Graves never co-wrote another book. Their formal literary partnership lasted only about a year. Aware, perhaps, of how much she had gained from working with Graves, Riding would later complete four works with different collaborators and propose similar projects to others, but she never repeated her early successes.

In *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, Riding elaborates her theory of poetry's uniqueness and its independence from the spirit of the age. Comparing poetry with prose, music, and art, she finds it superior to them all. In "Poetry and Music" she declares that it is wrong to use "the creative method" of music in poetry, and vice versa. "I am not distressed by the poeticization of music because I do not much care what happens to music," she writes. "It is a nervous and ostentatious performance, and little damage remains to be done to it. I am, on the other hand, distressed by the musicification [*sic*] of poetry because poetry is perhaps the only human pursuit left still capable of developing antisocially."

Riding then makes the remarkable assertion that "all real musicians are physically misshapen as a result of platform cozening of their audience. . . . All real poets are physically upright and even beautiful from indifference to community hearings." She disdains music as "an instrument for arousing emotions," and goes on to state that "the end of poetry is not to create a physical condition which shall give pleasure to the mind. It appeals to an energy in which no distinction exists between physical and mental conditions. . . . It *is* this energy in a form of extraordinary strength and intactness."

Without Graves at her side, Laura Riding turns out to be a graceless, undisciplined writer. Instead of thinking through her material and constructing logical expositions with supporting quotations and proofs, she harshly lays down the law. Her opinions are often so extreme and ignorant that the reader loses patience. To Roy Fuller, Riding's criticism was "exasperatingly unsatisfactory." "So much brilliance," he wrote, "so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

much unwillingness to keep on a sensible level of intelligibility, so much insight, so much superior dogmatism."

Yet there is much of value in Riding's essays. It is easy to see how another writer might find an insight in her work, extract it from its matrix of rodomontade, present it elsewhere in palatable form, and get credit for it. But if her ideas were often appropriated without acknowledgment, she helped bring this on herself.

The oddest essay in *Anarchism Is Not Enough* is surely "The Damned Thing," Riding's declaration of independence from sex. Stating that problems between men and women are the result of social conditioning, rather than of innate gender differences, she compares the sexes at length and concludes that women are superior in every respect. Men, she writes, are ugly, arrogant, and infantile. The sex instinct is "naturally repulsive" to the civilized mind, romance is "grotesque," and the sex act "undignified." The phallus is a "monotonous and trivial appendage" and a "clumsily devised gadget."

These extravagant judgments exemplify Riding's unrealistic expectations of love; she was constantly disappointed by it, as her poems show. In "Love Was No Tether . . . ," an early work that was probably addressed to Louis Gottschalk, the speaker is "liberated" by love, but soon runs away ("Lawless I broke the rule of one, / Fleeing you, fearing the lonely limit"). The disillusioned speaker in "Beauty Was Once . . ." asks her lover, "Why have you never come and brought the dawn?" "Dilemma" tells of a woman who is burdened with many suitors, cares for none, and wants to "throw [love] down / And crush it and have done with it for good."

The seven-stanza "Rhythms of Love," which is contemporaneous with "The Damned Thing," chronicles the progress and slow deterioration of a love affair. This poem reaches its climax in the beautiful third stanza, where the woman is completely absorbed in the man:

> Dark image of my mind,
> Shadow of my heart,
> Second footfall and third
> Partner of my doubleness
> And fourth of this—
> Love stops me short of counting to the end
> Where numbers fail and fall to two,
> Then one, then nothing, then you.

Passion soon cools and the lovers fall into habitual patterns of activity, like birds. Romance dies, sex continues but satisfies no one, and the affair reaches its demoralized end. "Rhythms of Love" and "The Damned Thing" indicate that by 1928 Riding was losing interest in Graves. These works set the stage for the central event of her life.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On April 27, 1929, Riding jumped from the window of the third-floor London flat she shared with Graves. Landing on her coccyx, she fractured four vertebrae, broke her pelvis in three places, and bent her spine severely. Hospitalized for eleven weeks, she was lucky to survive.

In the weeks before her suicide attempt, Riding and her circle seem to have been caught up in collective hysteria. That is the only possible explanation for their bizarre behavior. The trouble started in the autumn of 1928, when Geoffrey Phibbs, a minor poet and critic living in Ireland, discovered Riding's work, wrote her an admiring letter, and was invited to London. In February Phibbs appeared on Laura's doorstep with his wife, Norah McGuinness, an illustrator. Geoffrey and Norah were estranged at the time because Norah had been unfaithful.

Laura coldly escorted Norah to a hotel, handed her a bottle of brandy, said "Drink this and forget your tears," and stalked off. Phibbs stayed on in the flat and became Laura's literary collaborator and lover. Graves accepted the arrangement unprotestingly and continued to do Laura's bidding. Norah McGuinness returned briefly to Ireland and then went to Paris to study art. After a few enervating weeks of "Four Life" with Laura, Robert, and Nancy Nicholson, Geoffrey Phibbs wanted out. Hoping to reconcile with his wife, he arranged a rendezvous in Rouen, France. The others followed him there and tried to make him return to London. Laura offered to terminate sexual relations to keep the collaboration going. Phibbs refused further contact. Laura rolled on the floor, screaming, and was forcibly removed from the restaurant where the group was lunching.

The Phibbses returned to Ireland and broke up. Laura sent Graves to hunt Phibbs down and drag him back to London. The next morning, Laura, Geoffrey, Robert, and Nancy had a long, tense conversation in the flat. When Geoffrey again rejected any relationship, Laura swallowed Lysol, said "Good-bye, chaps," and jumped from the window.

She was either insane or immensely calculating throughout this disgraceful episode. Her attempt to bend Phibbs to her will deprived her of her dignity, betrayed and humiliated Graves, entangled innocent people in her personal affairs, and almost ended her life. She was subsequently to make such capital of her suicide attempt that one questions whether she really wanted to die. The Phibbs imbroglio was a melodrama of Riding's creation, in which she was both prime mover and star.

Suicide was a crime in England. As Riding recovered, the police prepared to indict her for moral turpitude and deport her to the United States. Graves used his connections to quash the charges, but everyone agreed that the two should leave England. A friend suggested they try Majorca, one of the Balearic Islands off the east coast of Spain. In

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

November they removed to the small Majorcan village of Deyá.

Riding began writing poems about the Phibbs affair in which she imaginatively transformed her pitiful acts into purposeful deeds with transcendent implications. The six-page poem "Then Follows" is one of the most ambitious (and confused) of these. The speaker explains that she died from an illness and then returned to life—that she had attempted suicide, was temporarily unconscious, and revived. During the interval when she was "dead," the speaker met God—a brainless, rather apologetic fellow—and chatted aimlessly with him. She next confesses that she did not really die or talk with God. Then she declares that a poet like herself inhabits a special region beyond God (a creature of pure mind) and mankind (which uses language). The poet has a more challenging task than either God or man, for she must reconcile the two. All that a poet can do, she concludes, is to write another poem, and another and another, until her life ends.

Such preposterous grandiosity bespeaks a creative presence barely under control. Emotion and intellect struggled constantly in Laura, producing extraordinary tension. The emotional Laura wanted love and companionship. Cheerful and affectionate, she was kind to many young writers. The intellectual Laura mistrusted her emotions, brutally suppressed them, and tried to make herself flawless and impregnably moral. When her humanity burst through, as inevitably it did, her life often veered out of control. She would struggle to restore order, lose her grip again, and start a new cycle. She was chronically tense and apprehensive.

Riding wrote many poems about her divided self. "The Twins," which she may have composed in college, describes "the original mother" who "bore nothing but twins"—misery and merriment. "Should we be less impartial than their mother, / Keep one company, ostracize the other?" she asks. "Brothers" tells of three brothers with very different personalities, who are alike in death. "And I," a dramatic monologue that Riding wrote in Deyá, equates bodily pain with psychic distress. "And do I ask, / How long this pain? / Do I not show myself in every way / To be happy in what most ravages?" she begins. She contrasts the self that enjoys being ravaged with pain (her self-hating, controlling personality) with the self that loves to be flattered (her vain, human side). She ends by predicting that her two personalities will eventually mellow—the extremes will perish—and merge:

> The fury will grow into calm
> As I grow into her
> And, smiling always,
> She looks serenely on their death-struggle,
> Having looked serenely on mine.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The mainspring of Laura Riding's creativity was the terrific tension of her divided self. As long as she was in turmoil, she wrote. When events brought her personality into stasis, she stopped.

Robert Graves's reputation grew rapidly in the early 1930s. When he came to Deyá he was already well known for *Good-Bye to All That,* his best-selling memoir of World War I. In 1934 he published *I, Claudius,* a novel about the Roman emperor. It was a huge critical and commercial success. As his star rose, he needed Laura Riding less and less. He indulged her every whim, but withdrew into his writing.

For emotional support, Riding formed a circle of literary associates with whom she worked on books and other projects. In choosing these people, she subordinated literary excellence to her need for companions who would take her seriously. Two of her protégés were Honor Wyatt, a newspaper beauty columnist, and Ward Hutchinson, a neighbor who had no literary ambitions. She convinced both that they had a gift for verse, spent hours teaching them, and arranged for publication of their work.

Riding behaved like a ruling goddess in Deyá. She dressed in long, dark skirts, embroidered velvet jackets, gaudy jewelry, and often a tiara with the name L-A-U-R-A spelled out in gold wire across the crown of her head. She dominated her circle completely, demanding that her associates confess their most intimate thoughts to her and slavishly follow her orders. Projecting her inner anxiety and panic on the people around her, she kept her associates edgy and fearful that she would turn on them. The most ambitious production of the Deyá circle was *Epilogue: A Critical Summary,* a journal founded to publish essays that would establish the final truth on all subjects. Volume 1, published in 1935, contained articles on the idea of God, French literature and art, Nazism, pastoral poetry, filmmaking, and photography. Its contributors included Riding, Madeleine Vara (a Riding pseudonym), Graves, and members of their circle. Two more issues of *Epilogue,* with equally eclectic contents, appeared in 1936 and 1937.

On July 18, 1936, General Francisco Franco declared a Fascist rebellion against the popular government of Spain, precipitating the Spanish Civil War. On August 2, the British consul informed Riding and Graves that he could no longer guarantee their physical safety in Majorca. They had five hours to leave. The couple reached London after an exhausting five-day journey. Laura now began to concern herself with international politics. She wrote to leading intellectuals and political figures asking for ideas. Their replies—accompanied by extensive commentary from Riding—appeared in a 1938 book called *The World and Ourselves.* To defeat Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, Riding proposed an oligarchy of women whose "life object" was "articulate truth." She led meetings that yielded the "Covenant of Literal Morality," which called for a "moral war on evil."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Riding's *Collected Poems* also came out in 1938. The book contained most of the verse she had produced to that time, and three new poems—"Doom in Bloom," "Seizure of the World," and "Nothing So Far"—that were the last she would publish for more than three decades. In these pessimistic works she was saying good-bye to poetry. "Weakly we write upon / The closing surface of oblivion," she wrote in "Doom in Bloom." The poem is filled with ominous imagery: "dark intent," "gruesomely joined in hate," "cruel compacted silence," "fate's wreckage."

When she wrote these lines, Laura Riding was thirty-seven. She was still living off Graves and had almost no independent identity. Her books got into print because Graves made publishers take them if they wanted his. She would soon resolve her problem in an extraordinary way.

In its Christmas 1938 issue, *Time* magazine reviewed eleven new books of verse, including the U.S. edition of Laura Riding's *Collected Poems*. *Time*'s anonymous review called Riding and Rainer Maria Rilke "true poets," and categorized the other nine as "poetasters" and "poeticules." Schuyler Jackson, the reviewer, owed his position to his close friend T. S. Matthews, *Time*'s book editor. Matthews had known Riding and Graves in Deyá, and had long wanted to introduce Jackson and Riding.

Schuyler Brinckerhoff Jackson II was a golden boy whose promise had come to nothing. Born into wealth, he studied literature and wrote poetry at Princeton, started a private press that never published a book, married well, fathered four children, and dissipated his wife's inheritance on ill-advised business ventures. By 1938 he was living on a farm near Philadelphia. He suffered from hypochondria and alcoholism, and his marriage was in trouble.

After reading *Time*'s notice, Riding sensed that she might have a promising future in the United States. She decided to return. Matthews arranged for her, Graves, and two friends to stay at the Jackson farm. Laura and Schuyler soon fell in love. Then they created a hysterical atmosphere at the farm that undermined the sanity of Schuyler's wife, Kit. She ended up in a straitjacket; Laura and Schuyler took over the farm.

By the spring of 1940 Kit had recovered enough to resume caring for her children, and Laura and Schuyler went to live in New York. The Jacksons were divorced a year later. Laura and Schuyler married and moved to Wabasso, a small town on the east coast of Florida.

In Wabasso the newlyweds lived on an allowance from Schuyler's father, ran a grapefruit-shipping business, and worked on literary projects. After years of dominating men, Laura became Schuyler's submissive wife. She waited on him and identified herself as "Mrs. Schuyler B. Jackson." Marriage seemed to free her from the pain and chaos of her divided self.

From 1948 until Schuyler died in 1968, the Jacksons worked on a book called *Rational Meaning: A New Foundation for the Definition of Words.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This work would eventually be published in 1997, six years after Laura's death. It is her final statement. *Rational Meaning* grew out of language reform projects that Laura originated in the early thirties. As she tells it, she began "to feel a practical sense of urgency about something that had long troubled me . . . that the use of words was in a bad way . . . because the knowledge of words was in a bad way." These projects and an early collaboration by the Jacksons were abandoned.

The objective of *Rational Meaning*, the Jacksons write, is to discover "a technique of knowledge inhering in the language itself." Seeking to achieve "complete definiteness in the determination of word meanings," they conclude that the meaning of words is inherent in the words themselves. Their position sharply contradicts most contemporary students of language who hold that word meanings are determined by social, political, and historical contexts. The Jacksons reject almost everything written on language in their time and acknowledge influence only from Charles M. Doughty, the English traveler (author of *Travels in Arabia Deserta*), poet, and advocate of language reform. Doughty's *The Dawn in Britain* is a six-volume epic poem written in a pre-Shakespearean version of English that the author adapted from Edmund Spenser.

Rational Meaning is a typical Laura Riding book. Eccentric and verbose, it contains page after monotonous page of pronouncements that she presents virtually without illustrative examples or quotations from the authors she attacks. Her prose is less combative than in the thirties essays, perhaps because of Schuyler's moderating influence. Like other works by Riding, *Rational Meaning* contains many acute observations and stimulating ideas along with much fantastic nonsense. What is best in this book will probably be reproduced elsewhere, without attribution.

After Schuyler's death, Laura started to publish again. In ferociously combative (and untrustworthy) reminiscences, she recounted her version of the years with Robert Graves. She wrote occasional poems and produced scattered essays in a style that is notable for its ugliness, overcomplication, and prolixity ("Poetry tends to blob up to the top of the particular importance-grades in the literary importance-range"). She specified that her name should be rendered as Laura (Riding) Jackson, though she is still better known as Laura Riding. Shortly before her death, she was awarded Yale University's Bollingen Prize for poetry.

Laura Riding's work was filled with wild contrasts. Some of her intense, exquisitely crafted poems compare favorably with anything done in this century, and she wrote many pages of brilliant criticism. But we strain to make sense of her weaker verses and her sloppier, more self-indulgent prose. In her life, which was similarly contradictory, she was sometimes generous and loving, sometimes grandiose and cruel. Perhaps the future will provide us the perspective we need to see this enigmatic woman more clearly, but for now, Laura Riding remains a puzzle.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Arendt and Eichmann at the Dinner Table

ANTHONY GRAFTON

The children of intellectuals confront history at the family dinner table. Over the clatter of forks on plates they hear their first discussions of the burning issues and insoluble problems, the provocative books, articles, and reviews that divide or unite communities. Their first dissections of novels and movies, plays and performances, come with the rib roast. Over salad they begin to see how the great world of ideas and ideals and the little one of personal experience and everyday life intersect. How do their parents and their friends apply what they believe to concrete practical and professional problems? How do they decide, and explain, what's right, what's wrong, what's possible? All this is served up, in the first instance, before dessert.

Or at least it all came with dinner, thirty-five years ago, as I sat, a few months after my bar mitzvah, in the sunny dining nook of our apartment in New York, and listened, through long summer evenings, to my parents talk about Hannah Arendt and the banality of evil. Dinners took a long time in those days, and the world quieted down to allow the rituals of conversation and consumption to take place in peace. Cocktails preceded food, stimulating discussion. The phone remained silent on its hook. Big problems could be discussed in detail, point by point. The world looked modern in our brand-new East Side apartment house: the plain walls, low ceilings, and steel balcony railings virtually yelled "Bau-

Anthony Grafton is the Dodge Professor of History at Princeton University. His most recent books are *The Footnote: A Curious History* and *Commerce with the Classics.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

haus." But there was time for old-fashioned, serious family talk—for a kind of sociability and learning that now seem as irrevocably distant as Clarence Day's *Life with Father* did to us.

No problem seemed bigger, none generated more serious talk, in 1963, than Arendt's *New Yorker* articles on Eichmann in Jerusalem and the book she made out of them. They baffled and fascinated families like mine all over New York. The Holocaust was only then beginning to rise to what has since become a hauntingly central place in Jewish visions and discussions of the recent past. But everyone—even children my age—had seen the newsreel footage of bodies rolling before bulldozers and the still shots of scarecrow-thin camp inmates greeting the soldiers who freed them. Everyone knew that Germans had devised and carried out this unique attack on innocent fellow citizens—and that many of those who participated in the Final Solution to the Jewish Problem still enjoyed positions of authority and wealth in the new West Germany. The horrors of modernity had not yet become the object of much close professional study. Only a few pioneers, like Raul Hilberg, had broken the academic taboos and begun to study the death camps and the system that sustained them in some depth. But even alert teenagers—to say nothing of alert adults—knew, or thought they knew, about the Six Million and the Germans. The destruction of the European Jews embodied the radical evil characteristic of totalitarian states—as Hannah Arendt had shown in what was already recognized as a classic book.

All the more amazing, then—and the more dismaying—that Arendt, of all people, had denied her own earlier insight. Arendt, after all, was one of the most prominent and influential of the New York Jewish intellectuals. She was one of the first to make a brilliant career in the university: the first woman named to a professorship at Princeton and a beloved teacher at the University of Chicago and the New School. As a writer she had done still better, escaping the little magazines to write reportage for *The New Yorker* and major books for the University of Chicago Press; Harcourt, Brace; and Viking.

Against all common sense, this profound student of the darkest side of human thought and action had become the inventor of an ingenious but infuriating paradox. She now insisted that Adolf Eichmann was no monster, no hideous alien or radiation-altered mutant from a horror movie, but an ordinary, banal man, unremarkable in ideology or achievement. Worse, she claimed that the Jews themselves—or at least the Jewish leaders, the members of the councils that had rounded up their own people and helped the Nazis ship them to the East—had suffered the same moral collapse as Germans and others, shown the same total failure to resist totalitarianism. She described Leo Baeck, the scholarly Berlin rabbi who led and tried to save Germany's Jewish community under the Nazis, and who barely survived his own confinement in Theresienstadt, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"the Jewish *Führer*"—taking a quotation from Hilberg out of context, as the Oxford historian Hugh Trevor-Roper pointed out, and horrifying the many German Jews and others who revered Baeck and supported the scholarly institute named after him. Perhaps worst of all, though she clearly respected Eichmann's judges, she despised both his prosecutor and Ben-Gurion himself, and showed little or no admiration for the institutions of the Jewish state whose feisty glamour had so won over most middle-class Americans that even Hollywood, always embarrassed about Jews and the Jewish question, had caught the infection—as everyone my age knew from sitting through the many hours of *Exodus*. No wonder that phone lines buzzed, correspondence pages crackled, envelopes bulged, and discussions blazed in overstuffed living rooms from our own polite East Side neighborhood to the livelier West, and on up to Washington Heights. In the world's largest Jewish city—in the nation's most serious, best-edited magazine—Jew had apparently betrayed Jew.

Every household that belonged to a synagogue, and thousands that didn't, must have asked the same angry questions. "But what does she mean by the banality of evil?" "How can she judge the Jewish councils? Can't she put themselves in her place? What would she have done?" "Does she like the Germans more than the Jews?" But the arguments reached a special pitch in our house. My father, Samuel Grafton, was an eminent journalist in the great age of American magazines. And while everyone was talking about Arendt, he was trying as hard as he could to meet her, to thresh out the problems face to face. *Look*—a national periodical in a sense now hard to imagine, which claimed a circulation of more than 7,400,000 in the fall of 1963, and was famous for its vivid photojournalism while also regularly given to printing long articles on political and social problems—had assigned him to explain to a wide public why Arendt's dry, concise, fact-packed book had caused such fury.

In the early fall he began to work on "The Controversy That Rocks the Jews." He sent Arendt a long, sharply worded questionnaire as preparation for an interview. She wrote even longer, sharper answers and exacted a promise that she could approve all the quotations from her that appeared in the final article. But then negotiations broke down. She refused to meet my father, and his story, which had thus lost its central character, became impossible to publish.

The Arendt dispute—as is clear in retrospect—blew up at a strategic time. Intellectuals and their doings had suddenly become news, in an unfamiliar way. The Kennedys invited professors to the White House and fumed on the rare occasions when their charm did not work its seductive magic on them. The new quality paperbacks brought abstract, erudite treatises on other-directedness and the death wish to thousands of eager readers. The high-cultural magazines, like *Partisan Review* and *Commen-*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tary, provided a sense of intellectual community for thousands of readers who loved to watch their brilliant, aggressive writers argue. Alert New York editors scanned their closely printed pages for new talent; alert New York journalists made fun of their touchy, hyperarticulate editors. "He's the man who wrote the piece on the man who wrote the piece on David Riesman"—this jingle, quoted long ago by Norman Podhoretz, conveys something of the atmosphere, congested, sensitive, and irritable, in which the banality of evil brought so many Jewish—and non-Jewish—readers to the boiling point.

The context seems strange. It's hard nowadays to imagine a time when American intellectuals looked glamorous. But in another sense, the story of the Arendt debate looks very familiar. For decades, after all, we Americans have carried on all our intellectual controversies pretty much the same way. A book comes out, offering a radical new take on a painful and delicate topic—the genetic component in intelligence, or the reasons for the Holocaust, or the fall of the American intellectual. Initial reviews and articles make clear that the author has something new and controversial to say. Prominent writers and thinkers take positions. Quarrels break out at public forums.

All of a sudden, a story emerges: not the story of the original book, which becomes at most a sidebar, and usually nothing more than a first paragraph. Rather, the conflict becomes the story. Individual positions and posturings, particular reviews and debates, generate still more publicity. The actual theses and substance of the original book lie buried and forgotten, unread or distorted, under the tons of invective hurled at the author and his or her detractors. In many cases, no one actually seems to have read the original, though everyone has read the cover article about it in the *New York Times Book Review.*

Journalists need to find a dramatic hook for every article and to summarize complex, colorful theories in stark black and white, two good ways to heap more fuel on the fires they cover. Radio and television shows—and the World Wide Web—do more to confuse than inform. Often they give currency to falsehoods. Nuances drop away, distinctions disappear, group divisions harden. In the end, the debate often pulls entirely free of its original moorings. Once the wheels begin to turn, the *School of Athens* turns into the *Garden of Earthly Delights:* off go the philosophical masks, out come the grimacing demons that had been hiding behind them. The Arendt debate, in short, was an early instance of a routine that is as familiar now as college sit-ins were in the sixties. As in those days, one's stomach begins to hurt as soon as the first signs of trouble appear, for one knows only too well the whole ugly, unenlightening course that the discussion will take.

No wonder that Arendt and her friends, including Mary McCarthy, gave so little quarter even when they replied to the mildest of Arendt's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

critics. No wonder either that Arendt refused, in the end, to speak to my father: she described him, in a letter to the philosopher Karl Jaspers, as one of her professed enemies, a Jewish journalist who had interviewed only her critics. That eternally curious intellectual, her eyes and mind and heart always open, even to those with whom she fundamentally disagreed, had every reason to turn and seek shelter when she found herself caught in the unrelenting storm of fury and misrepresentation that her book called forth.

And yet—and yet. The story isn't quite so simple. I was sitting at that dinner table, and I remember: the serious, ambitious beginning of the project; a few of the interviews and my father's descriptions of them; Arendt's engagement—and then her withdrawal; the article written without the conversation that should have formed its core; the final draft, polished, corrected, and filed away, with a handwritten note on the first page recording that it had never appeared. Such were the unhappy annals of the freelance life. But I didn't know the inner history of the story until recently. When my father died in the fall of 1997, my family began to look at his files. They were stuffed with documents about the story that he had tried to write. Arendt scholarship, meanwhile, has grown into something of an academic industry, and many of her letters and papers have now been published as well. The contours of the story that the documents reveal have become complex. History complements, and complicates, memory.

The unexpected turns of the story begin early: in fact, with the workings of the magazine that asked for the story in the first place. *Look*'s editors—so a memorandum in my father's files reveals—did not simply commission a piece about Arendt when the press discussion reached white heat. Betty Leavitt—Picture Editor by title, but, like *Look* itself, concerned with more than pictures—read Arendt's articles and her book, as well as the reactions these provoked. She carefully identified many of the vicious untruths and half-truths that had circulated most widely. Leavitt pointed out, for example, that Arendt, who had worked for many years for Youth Aliyah and other Zionist enterprises, was hardly the self-hating Jew evoked by some of her opponents. An engaged and principled critic of the Zionists and their state, she had broken with them in the forties over their treatment of the Arabs in Palestine—a prescient position that has won her immense respect, even adoration, in liberal Israeli circles in recent years. Leavitt also supported Arendt in one of her most controversial stances. Arendt insisted, with contemptuous certainty (and, in retrospect, with considerable accuracy), that very few Germans had opposed the Nazis. *Time* magazine and other mainstream media, committed to the Atlantic alliance and Outpost Berlin, denounced this position with special vigor. But *Look* didn't buy into the received wisdom.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Leavitt also noted that most critics had failed even to mention, much less to discuss, Arendt's central arguments, such as her definition of genocide as a new kind of crime, one directed against humanity as a whole. At the same time, however, she noted some of the obviously provocative points in Arendt's book, including the attack on the Jewish councils. In many of these passages, Leavitt concluded, Arendt showed a smugness and insensitivity that naturally incensed her readers.

The editors of *Look*, in other words, did far more than commission an article. They actively investigated the issues that they planned to cover, read and thought about them—and did so with a rigor and an attention to detail not found in most of the published responses to Arendt's book. Their professionalism and precision inspire respect and suggest that the Arendt affair marked something more than the beginning of a new age of recycled charges and countercharges. It was also the end of an older age—one in which national, as well as highbrow, media saw it as their task to inform the public at large, as well as they could, about major new ideas and debates, to make their readers an informed and critical community. William Shawn's *New Yorker*—now revered in memory as the one great product of immaculate, meticulous editorial care—had some surprising counterparts lower down the journalistic food chain. The public sphere of the early sixties—for all the hysteria that seized it in Arendt's case, impoverishing thought and overheating language—looks impressively thoughtful in retrospect. Certainly it was not the world of plots and cabals that Arendt herself imagined, one in which Jewish organizations mysteriously seized control of national periodicals and tried to turn them against her.

If *Look* was not a modern newsmagazine, dragged into superficiality by the unrelenting pace of the news cycle, my father was not a modern reporter, unpracticed in confronting complex issues in a complex way. A poor Jewish boy from Philadelphia, he had excelled in the public schools and received a splendid humanistic education at Central High School and the University of Pennsylvania. He had read his way through the classics of English literature—I still have the little blue volumes from the Oxford World's Classics series, signed and dated as he bought them, one a week, at Leary's bookshop. He had modeled his fluent, complex, muscular prose on the English of Addison and Steele, Lamb and Macaulay. And by doing so he had won the attention of H. L. Mencken, who awarded him a prize of five hundred dollars—in 1929 dollars—for the best essay on "My Four Years at College," submitted in a national contest sponsored by Mencken and George Jean Nathan.

The article appeared in Mencken's *American Mercury*, with a picture of my father looking oddly like one of Walter Camp's All-Americans. It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

made his name, setting him on the way to a dazzling career as a reporter on the Philadelphia *Ledger,* where he learned his trade on the mean and violent city streets of the early Depression, and as an editor and syndicated columnist on the New York *Post,* where he became one of America's most prominent liberal voices. He followed the running down of the New Deal in the years before the war and wrote informed columns on labor troubles, race relations, and foreign affairs. Like Arendt, he was sometimes prescient: he infuriated FDR by denouncing the American recognition of Vichy, calling a Fascist spade a spade. Later he covered the end of the war and the fall of the free governments in Eastern Europe, finding his best sources, once again, in the streets. To the amazement of his fellow reporters, most of whom knew no foreign languages, my father could interview displaced persons from every country in Europe. (He was, of course, speaking to them not in Romanian or Dutch but in what remained of the Yiddish he had spoken as a small boy.) An experienced student of America's foreign relations, a cosmopolitan who had traveled extensively and lived abroad, an unobservant Jew with many prominent Jewish friends, and a constant, passionate reader on every imaginable subject, he made a natural candidate to investigate the Arendt controversy, even though he was neither a professor nor a member of the circles nowadays referred to as the New York intellectual community.

When my father set out to confront Arendt, he took the same high intellectual road that his editors had already traveled. He read her work, discussed it with her editor at Viking Books, and sent her a set of written queries that frankly reflected his response both to her work and to the reactions it had provoked. He asked straight questions:

> Do you feel that the reactions to your book throw any new light on the tensions in Jewish life and politics today?
>
> Do you consider that the Jews, as a whole, have learned anything from the Hitler experience?
>
> Have any Jewish leaders supported the book, and, if so, who are they?

He wondered if one could not defend Hausner, the prosecutor in Eichmann's trial, by reflecting that he "was under no obligation to behave with full judicial balance." He urged Arendt to reflect on Jewish collaboration and resistance, to ponder whether the Jews could really have done more than they did. And he graphically described his own reactions to her work, as a means of inducing her to think about the way her intellectual style and arguments might affect a normal reader.

My father admitted that the demoralizing effects of totalitarianism, as Arendt had compellingly explained them, accounted for much. But was there not something monstrous, after all, "in Eichmann's devotion and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dedication to his task?" Or was Arendt's clear-eyed thesis simply too hard for ordinary people to accept so soon after the event?

> I found that I accepted your explanation intellectually, and then became ruffled every time you minimized Eichmann's importance. Then I calmed down as you explained more, and became upset all over again when you down-graded Eichmann later. Is it possible that your thesis has come on the scene a little too early—that the reaction would be quite different, say twenty-five years from now? Is timing, in other words, at the bottom of the controversy, in your view?

If the controversy had become the story, my father was trying to understand it on its own terms—to see why it had burst out rather than to explain it away or to blame it, as many did, on the ignorance of Jewish history supposedly revealed by Arendt's slips on points of detail.

The questionnaire posed detailed, undeferential questions. My father pushed hard, for example, on the subject of the Jewish councils, insisting that their conduct could not be understood outside its long-term historical context:

> Have not Jewish leaders worked with their Gentile overlords throughout the diaspora, cajoling, co-operating, pleading, maneuvering? Was not the method frequently successful? If the old methods had become obsolete were not Jewish leaders then guilty, at most, of an historical misinterpretation? Could they have been expected to realize that Nazism was not the final development of anti-Semitism, but the first manifestation of a new evil, complete totalitarianism, linked with genocide?

At what moment, he asked, should the Jewish leaders have said "Co-operate no longer, but fight"?

Many of the New York intellectuals who took positions for or against Arendt knew little or nothing about the history of the Jews. Though a number of them had spoken Yiddish as children, and some would return to the study of Jewish texts and problems at a later date, few of them had written on Jewish questions or Jewish history before 1963. They had turned their faces to the warm, bright beacon of Western culture like so many flowers following the sun. Most of them knew far more about the Saint Petersburg of Gogol and Dostoyevsky, the Paris of Baudelaire and Manet, or the London of Eliot and Woolf than they did about their ancestral shtetl and its recent fate. Arendt—whose own concern with the history and tragedy of European Judaism was long established—had justice on her side when she complained that her critics in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the circles around *Partisan Review* and *Dissent* seemed to take their ignorance as a qualification for denouncing her.

My father's questions, by contrast, rested on deep personal knowledge—on what he had heard, as a child, about life in the Russian Empire's Pale of Settlement, and what he had read, as a man, about the history of the ghetto (another subject he researched in the early sixties). When he pushed Arendt, he did so after serious reading and hard thinking.

Arendt pushed back just as hard in a reply that stretched over some thirteen pages. She insisted that my father's questions misrepresented the historical possibilities—and overstated the retrospective demands she herself made of the Jews and their leaders:

> There never was a moment when the community leaders [could] have said "Cooperate no longer, but fight!," as you phrase it. Resistance, which existed but played a very small role, meant only: we don't want that kind of death, we want to die with honor. But the question of cooperation is indeed bothersome. There certainly was a moment when the Jewish leaders could have said: We shall no longer cooperate, we shall try to disappear.

In particular, the Jewish leaders could have done this instead of deciding which Jews should be sent to the killing centers and which allowed to remain.

Statements of this kind in Arendt's book had proved among its most explosive contents. What, many readers asked, could she possibly have meant by saying that the Jews should simply have refused to cooperate? How can one refuse to cooperate with someone who has overwhelming force at his disposal? Where could they have disappeared to? Arendt's answers to my father do not entirely clarify her position. But they show that she had thought, and hard, about the moral dilemma with which Baeck and others found themselves confronted—that she had tried, as many of her critics thought she had not, to imagine her way into the nightmare they had lived and to find the defining moment when they had made the wrong moral decision about how to deal with it. The Jewish leaders, she argued, "fully informed of what deportation meant, were asked by the Nazis to prepare the lists for deportation." The community leaders knew what awaited those shipped to the extermination camps. Nonetheless, they drew up the lists; they chose those who were to go and those who were to stay. True, they followed guidelines set by the Nazis as to "the number and categories" of those they sent. But they themselves made the selection: "In other words, those who co-operated were at that particular moment masters over life and death. Can't you imagine what that meant in practice?"

To the claim that "if some of us have to die, it is better we decide it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than the Nazis," Arendt firmly replied: "I disagree. It would have been infinitely better to let the Nazis do their own murderous business." She condemned with equal firmness the notion that the Jewish councils had honorably sacrificed some of the Jews under their control in order to save others. Such basically pagan expedients, she argued, had no place in the Jewish tradition as she knew it, or in her own religion, which she did not define: "This sounds to me like the last version of human sacrifice. Pick seven virgins, sacrifice them to placate the wrath of the gods. Well, this is not my religious belief, and most certainly is not the faith of Judaism."

Finally, Arendt insisted that she had not meant "to bring this part of our 'unmastered past' to the attention of the public. It so happened that the *Judenräte* came up at the trial and I had to report on that as I reported on everything else." This portion of her work, she argued, "plays no prominent role—either in space or in emphasis. It has been blown up out of all reasonable proportion." Certainly no one reading Arendt's words could have doubted her passionate engagement with her fellow Jews and their fate. Only an anguished love could have generated such a dark and complex involvement with the decisions of those she condemned so radically.

Yet Arendt's replies did not all do full justice to my father's questions. She was right to stress that many Jewish survivors shared her view of the role of the Jewish councils. But when she argued that her critics had taken her comments out of context and blown up their importance, she showed how poorly she grasped the texture and impact of her own intellectual and literary style. Arendt wrote—as Gershom Scholem and many others complained—in an ironic, allusive style, making asides do the duty of complex arguments and using a wide range of tones, to which a careless or irritable reader could easily prove deaf. When she discussed the role of the Jewish councils so rapidly, she did not suggest that the subject had no major role in the economy of her book. Rather, she supplied many of her critics with one of their strongest grounds for attacking her: that she ignored nuance and complexity as she passed summary judgment, briefly and bitterly, on historical actors and situations of radically different kinds.

For their part, my father's questions did not do full justice to Arendt's work or to her previous life. Unlike his editors, he did not draw attention to Arendt's Zionist past. The omission is curious, especially since during the forties he was involved with Zionist circles and organizations in New York at the same time that Arendt and some of her friends were developing their critique of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. They must have lectured and argued in the same synagogue halls. On the whole, however, their sharp dialogue on paper was well designed and executed. It should have prepared the ground for a discussion of the reactions to Arendt far more searching than any of those that actually took place.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Both participants thought hard. Both knew a great deal. Both spoke their minds. And neither of them, obviously, was thinking about superficial questions: they went, from their two points of view, to the heart of the matters that divided them.

The conversation, however, ended with the first exchange. As Arendt told the story to Karl Jaspers, she decided that the interview would really be an inquisition—and that my father's role in the matter revealed not the seriousness of the magazine that had assigned him the story but the zeal of her Jewish enemies:

> And then one of the big illustrated magazines here, *Look,* wanted to do a report on this whole business at the end of July. They suggested a well-known, non-Jewish reporter. My publisher, as well as *The New Yorker,* thought I should agree to do it (answering written questions under certain conditions). They thought the story would be handled in a thoroughly fair way. But when *Look* came to do the story, they assigned another reporter to it, a Jew, who interviewed only people who had already spoken out against me. And he sent me a questionnaire full of loaded questions. I answered the questions, but then my publisher and *The New Yorker* thought it would be better not to cooperate. There is no question in my mind that the Jewish organizations got wind of *Look*'s plans and intervened.

Read against the hard evidence of my father's drafts and notes, this letter reveals a dismaying side of Arendt's own personality, a lack of balance in her own response to the controversy she had provoked. Her self-assured assertion that a Jew obviously could not handle the story fairly has the ring of German Jewish arrogance at its most unbearable. In fact, my father not only knew the subject intimately, but had sharply criticized the American government for its failure to help the European Jews at a time when this position was highly unpopular in America itself. One of his columns had even led to the creation of a small "free port" for Jews in Oswego, New York—a deeply problematic effort, but one that saved a good many lives. His files show that he went to work as a professional, open-minded and eager to collect information from many different sources—even as Arendt was deciding, on no evidence, that he would not do so.

When my father first sent Arendt his questions, he mentioned that he had already spoken about her work with her editor at *The New Yorker,* William Shawn. He also said that he intended to interview some of her critics—notably Judge Michael Musmanno, a veteran of the Nuremberg Trials who had condemned Arendt's book in a controversial Sunday *Times* review, and "a number of Jewish leaders." These included, for example, his close friend the producer Dore Schary. Arendt urged him

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to see, as well, some of those who took her side, or who at least considered the harshest attacks on her unfair. The list of names she gave him included Dwight Macdonald, Jason Epstein, Hans Morgenthau, George Agree, and Norman Podhoretz—a fair sampling of the independent New York intelligentsia.

Even as Arendt and her publisher were deciding that my father intended to denounce her, he was interviewing the informants she had suggested to him. He discussed Arendt and her work in detail with several of them, meticulously sending them all the quotations that he wanted to use for their review and approval. And he found that they hardly offered unequivocal support for Arendt's analysis. Jason Epstein, for example, defended her book as a whole. But he admitted that Arendt had attacked the Jewish organizations with "excessive zeal." Morgenthau and Podhoretz both emphasized the complexity of the problem of Jewish collaboration, and Morgenthau—like many of the critics who read Arendt without any sympathy—remarked that she had done her own argument harm by presenting it so briefly, in asides. George Agree, who defended Arendt more wholeheartedly than the others, actually thanked my father for his efforts to give a more balanced treatment than previous journalists had managed. Phones must have rung on the Upper West Side and in Hyde Park, in the houses of Arendt's close friends, if not in hers, as he went the rounds. It seems impossible that she did not know that he was actually doing what she had suggested—or that he was doing so in a fair-minded, serious way, trying to do justice to both sides, rather than as an inquisitor set on her by mysterious Jewish organizations.

But by this point Arendt had developed a kind of paranoia about her critics, especially the Jewish ones. Walter Laqueur, with whom she had a sharp exchange in the *New York Review of Books,* and whom she described as being in effect the employee of Jews bent on her destruction, was nettled enough to assure her sarcastically that she need not fear the Elders of Zion. My father's open eyes and fair mind were lost on the apostle of the open soul. She insisted that *Look* had promised not to publish his article if she disapproved of it. (In fact, as their correspondence shows, this was untrue. My father and his editors had promised only that she could approve all quotations from the intended interview.) She even argued, understandably but feebly, that an article that mentioned her refusal to be interviewed would do her an injustice.

Like the professional he was, my father went ahead and wrote his piece anyway: an analysis of how "a book, a single book, by a fifty-seven-year-old Jewish woman, has melted the recent Jewish past into a boiling flux, in which familiar historical landmarks have been swallowed up, and what seemed like truths have been corroded and rotted beyond

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

recognition." He described Eichmann's arrest, his trial, Arendt's reports—and the "wave of uneasiness" that swept the Jews as these appeared: "Among Jews at the economic and cultural level which reads *The New Yorker,* Dr. Arendt's articles became dinner-table subject number one." He traced the controversy: the appearance of Arendt's book, the denunciation of it by Musmanno, and the denunciation of Musmanno, in turn, by *The New Yorker* and many individuals. He offered an acute, critical reading of Arendt's book: "As she hacks her way through dense thickets of fact, she drops numerous side remarks, usually in an abrasive style. . . . This is the sort of remark that makes the average Jewish reader, and indeed many a non-Jew, rise out of his chair like a Nike rocket." He made clear that Musmanno—and other angry readers—often misread Arendt's irony and sarcasm. And he explained her theory: that "under totalitarianism, . . . evil becomes an everyday matter." He was often sharply critical, sometimes insightfully so—as when he remarked that "whereas she tries to get beneath the surface in Eichmann's case, and writes about him with something like a novelist's compassion, she does no such probing in the case of leading Jews, and actually calls their role 'the darkest chapter of the whole dark story.'" And he did—as Arendt feared he would—describe at length the position of Jewish organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League. "There are few nuances in the Jewish reaction," he concluded. No Jewish leader he could find would go on record as supporting her book. "Several on Miss Arendt's list of impartial observers," he wrote, "felt that she did not pay enough attention to facts which contradicted her theories."

Perhaps my father's most interesting suggestions, however, came toward the end of the article. He suggested there, as he had in his original questionnaire, that Arendt had literally spoken too soon. "The wounds are too recent, the graves are too fresh for that, and to most Jews and many non-Jews the cool theory that those men who operated the slaughter machine were less than evil seems a callous incitement to fury." More insightfully still, he made it clear that the affair was, in the end, a media event—a debate that threw up few new facts and shed little new light, and had become, in the end, the story, while *Eichmann in Jerusalem* itself sank from sight:

> Amazingly, according to Viking Press, the book has sold only about 10,000 copies, an extremely small number for a work about which so much has been said. Many who are discussing it have not read it; in a sense the controversy has floated loose from the book, and become a phenomenon in its own right, with a life of its own.

Media on media, white on white, the spin cycle: my father saw them all emerging from the details of the Arendt debate. It was the beginning of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

new world—and one that a survivor from the older world could not view with ease.

The piece was never published: without an appearance by Arendt herself, it became *Hamlet* without the prince. And of course the controversy gradually died down, as Kennedy's assassination, the crises of the Civil Rights movement, and the war in Vietnam moved to center stage in public consciousness. The dinner-table conversation at our house moved with them—moved, blow by blow and terrible image by terrible image, into the vortex of the late sixties, for which nothing had prepared us; moved, in family reunions held in later years, into the great emptiness of the eighties and nineties. My father, never fooled by glitz and hype, looked at the people sleeping on the streets in his once pristine New York neighborhood and remarked that things were now about as bad as they had been in his childhood in a poor, socially and racially mixed quarter of Philadelphia at the beginning of our century of progress.

The wide themes of politics, so Lawrence Weschler writes in his wonderful triptych, *Calamities of Exile*, "first get broached and rehearsed around the family dinner table, the place, after all, where we all receive our first gashed edges and in flight from which we all experience our first intimations of exile." It's true: even those of us who don't resemble Weschler's equivocal heroes rebel and flee. I did too. But looking backward from middle age, I see that round table in the late-afternoon light not as a place of confinement but as one of warmth and excitement, a life raft for the mind in the midst of what was becoming a blinding, deafening storm of contradictory messages.

I can pick out, from the stories my parents told and retold, the origins of much that has become familiar, too familiar, in subsequent years: the media covering the media, with journalists dinging journalists; the hysteria about a single controversial book; the newspaper articles, studded with quotations pulled out of context, that dramatize and deplore. But I can also see the outlines of a social and intellectual world we no longer inhabit—a better world, though one already in its last years. In it, intellectuals lived and worked both outside and inside the universities. Newspaper reporters and magazine editors had the training and the time—more time than professors seem to have now—to read complicated books attentively and well. Professional intellectuals could write a clean, sharp, accessible English even when they were furious. There was, in short, something like an intelligentsia—one prone to hysteria and foolishness, but also one committed to serious debate, to the publishing and criticism of serious books and articles, to the long-term building of intellectual communities centered on particular magazines, big and little.

At least one central, poisonous element of our end-of-century ways of writing and reading was not there: our obsession with the trivial and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

external. My father brought up only one item of personal gossip in his questions to Arendt—a rumor, floated in some Jewish circles, that she had converted to Catholicism. And he did so only in order to assure her that he would not mention the matter in his article. Arendt herself was grimly amused by this canard. Nowhere, in my father's notes or in the published pieces I have read, have I found a reference to Arendt's looks, her clothing, her relationships: only to what she wrote and how it should be understood and judged.

It's a shame that my father and Hannah Arendt missed their connection, that neither could respond with the wisdom and perception that the other deserved. But it's a bigger shame that we would find it hard to stage, or even to imagine, such a conversation now—much less to prepare for it as they did. The noise has grown too loud, the news travels too quickly, and the phone rings too often, as brokers try to sell us Potlatch-Burn-Your-Money stock accounts and charities demand what money we have left, all while we're trying to have a quiet half-hour dinner with our children. The conversation at those dinner tables in the early sixties was good, even when all the *i*'s weren't dotted or all the *t*'s crossed. It was the serious talk of serious people about serious things: it made a compelling way to encounter some of the complexities of the world and history for the first time. To contemplate the changes that have taken place since then in publishing, in writing, in public debate and private discussion; to compare the intellectuals we have now with those we had then; to read the documents of that first media debate against those of more recent ones—to do all this is to admit that we have suffered a loss too great to measure.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION INVITATION

Try the next issue of ***Wilson Quarterly*** *FREE!*

"The newsmagazine of the world of ideas"

DISCOVER...how every issue of Wilson Quarterly brings you crisp book summaries of as many as a dozen genuinely important new works of history, politics, science, culture, economics, and society in less than an hour.

LEARN...from WQ's summaries of thirty or more significant articles appearing in specialized journals such as Foreign Policy, The Brookings Review, The New Criterion, and The Economist.

BENEFIT...from deep-probing essays by distinguished fellows of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and other noted experts on events, issues, and people important to our lives today.

RISK FREE SUBSCRIPTION INVITATION... Try the next issue of the Wilson Quarterly without cost or obligation. Just fill out and mail the coupon below and you'll receive our forthcoming issue without delay.

WQ FREE ISSUE REQUEST COUPON

❑ **Yes!**

Send my FREE trial issue of the Wilson Quarterly and start my subscription. If I like it, I'll remit $20 and receive three more issues, a year's total of four. If I decide not to continue, I'll write "cancel" on the invoice, return it, and owe nothing.

Add $15 per year for all foreign and Canadian subscriptions. Send orders prepaid in U.S. currency. Magazines will be mailed via airmail. Please allow 4 to 5 weeks for delivery of first issue.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ *State* _____ *Zip* _____

Mail coupon to:
THE WILSON QUARTERLY
P.O. Box 420402
Palm Coast, FL 32142-0402

A91AM5

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE UNCERTAIN ART

The Medical School and the University

SHERWIN B. NULAND

The façade of one of the two outward-facing wings of the Yale School of Medicine bears an Ozymandian inscription: INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RELATIONS. As Shelley told us, that great conquerer's "shattered visage" and "vast and trunkless legs of stone" were all that was left of the lofty claims of a forgotten era, and so it is with the building's name. Both in the ancient suzerainty of Ozymandias and at Yale, "nothing beside remains" of a powerful leader's dream, except those few traces proclaiming a majesty that lived for a brief time and today exists in the memory of almost no one.

Only rarely does a passing student or visitor comment on the imposing words chiseled into the medical school's granite front, or wonder that one wing of this grand building should be dedicated to a concept that seems not only abstruse, but also unrelated to the mission of a modern medical school. What, precisely, could be meant by "Institute of Human Relations"? What might have been the intention of its founder, and what could the inscription have to do with the teaching or practice of medicine?

In fact, the founding of the Institute of Human Relations in 1929 was perhaps the most ambitious step ever taken toward the idealistic goal of creating a firm bond of unity between a medical school and the rest of its university—a bond so firm that students and faculties of both would intermingle, exchange ideas, and join in projects for the betterment of academic life and of humankind in general. It was the bold idea of a bold man.

When Milton Winternitz arrived at Yale from Johns Hopkins as professor of pathology in 1917, the medical school was at a low point in its fortunes and reputation. Within three years Winternitz had exerted such a dynamic and visionary influence on the school's affairs that he was elected dean. Described by colleagues as "an intense fountainhead of energy, an inexhaustible generator of ideas and constant stimulator of the imagination"—and more vividly by Yale's president, James Rowland Angell, as "that steam engine in pants"—Winternitz was determined to bring the medical school closer to the university in academic standards, in intellectual spirit, and in educational philosophy. He raised standards for admission and for faculty recruitment; redesigned the curriculum to allow students to indulge their research, clinical, and even humanistic interests in a variety of ways; and organized the various medical specialties into academic departments. In establishing his conviction that medical students should be seen as graduate students whose intellectual milieu is the entire campus, he saw to it that young people from various disciplines in the Yale community intermingled in the classroom.

To Winternitz, medicine was a social science. Its primary concerns had traditionally been with sick organs, but he saw the proper role of a medical school as the study of the whole man living in a social and economic environment. To understand disease, one had to understand health and the conditions that affect it. In this Winternitz was a disciple of the great nineteenth-century German pathologist Rudolf Virchow, who believed that the health of an individual is largely determined by the socioeconomic conditions under which he lives. Virchow was the greatest microscopic pathologist of his age (known, in fact, as "the Pope of German medicine"), but he was also the greatest proponent of what he called the "humanistic" view of patients, individually and collectively. As a scientist, Virchow defined hu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

manism as "the scientific knowledge of the manifold and various relations of the thoughtful individual person to the ever-changing world."

Though separated by culture, generation, and geography, Winternitz and Virchow had much in common. They were both small, wiry men who were not physically prepossessing. Capable of enormous amounts of work, both were martinet-like in the demands they made on themselves and others, to the point that they were feared or disliked by many colleagues and students even as they were held in near-universal awe as scientists and leaders in their profession. Both became legends in their institutions and their disciplines.

To Winternitz, it seemed obvious that the only way to achieve his objectives was to meld his school into the general academic life around it—a goal that had never been attained since medical faculties first became parts of greater teaching institutions in Bologna, Montpellier, and Paris in the early thirteenth century. On the continent of Europe, those three great shrines of learning had spawned a tradition that the education of physicians was to be conducted in the university; but medical faculties had remained, for the most part, quite separate from the activities of the other intellectual disciplines that grew up over the centuries. In England, in fact, the best medical teaching was found at independent schools that had been established in large hospitals. In all countries the great majority of physicians, and especially surgeons, were educated by some form of apprenticeship to an established practitioner, from whom they learned the rudiments of care via a non-system that might be thought of as on-the-job training. In time, guildlike societies accorded some form of certification to the best-trained and most capable doctors, but until well into the nineteenth century the ordinary citizen was unlikely to be treated by someone whose skills had been evaluated by a formal body of experts.

The situation in North America emerged from a mix of these backgrounds. Until the establishment of a medical school at the University of Pennsylvania in 1765, it was impossible to obtain the M.D. degree in the Western Hemisphere. Young men traveled to various European schools to study medicine; the most popular school—and the one that most influenced the development of an American system—was the University of Edinburgh. But such students were relatively few. Of twelve hundred physicians who served in the Colonial army during the Revolutionary War, only a hundred had medical degrees. The rest had been trained in the apprenticeship system. Even by 1800, only two other American medical schools had been established—at Kings College (now Columbia University) and Harvard.

At this point the American entrepreneurial spirit made itself felt. Responding to the need for formal medical training, physicians began to open private "proprietary" schools, which provided a half-dozen lectures per day supplemented by assigned readings in standard texts. Between 1810 and 1876, no fewer than seventy-three new schools were founded. Though some were nominally associated with a university, the great majority were doctor-owned and profit-driven. The mass teaching was often so poor that faculty members augmented their income by giving private instruction, individually or in small groups, to those who could afford it. Even after the middle of the nineteenth century, when scientific research had become an important part of European medical thought, none but the most rudimentary forms of laboratory equipment could be found in such schools—and even then, in only a few of them.

A mere handful of the approximately fifty university-affiliated medical schools in the United States were able to attain a higher level of teaching and bedside instruction than the norm. An American doctor might fill the gaps in his education by "walking the wards" and taking courses in a European clinic. The popularity of Parisian hospitals in the early part of the century was superseded by that of German-speaking schools after about 1860. In the two decades before 1900, a number of young Americans took part in research directed by leading German scientists. Imbued with the spirit of what their mentors called *Lehrfreiheit und Lernfreiheit* (best translated as academic freedom, a notion that grew out of the rebellions of 1848), they chafed against the straitjacketed ways in which medicine was being taught in their native land. There arose a cadre of leaders in the profession who were con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cerned about the generally low level of the American system of medical education, and about its restrictions on freedom of thought.

Since its founding in 1847, the American Medical Association had been deeply concerned about the poor training of most physicians. In 1906 its Council on Medical Education conducted a study of all of the nation's medical schools.

Measured by criteria that the Council considered the highest university standard, the entire system was shown to be in disarray. Only the recently founded Johns Hopkins Medical School, based entirely on the German model of a research university with high achievement by both faculty and students, provided the academic atmosphere that was thought essential if American physicians were to take their place among the world's most accomplished in science and clinical care.

The well-funded Carnegie Foundation, established a year earlier, was concerned with the same problem. In 1908 its directors chose an experienced educator, Abraham Flexner, to carry out an exhaustive study of the nation's 155 medical schools, using the Johns Hopkins model and the Council's advice to define the criteria of excellence. Flexner's findings were as appalling as the AMA's. His 1910 report, now considered a classic in the literature of medicine (and of education) contained explicit recommendations that would so transform American medical schools that within a few decades they would be recognized as the best in the world.

Flexner's most fundamental thesis, perhaps, was his correct insistence that medicine must be taught and practiced on a scientific basis. This, he stated, "gives an undoubted advantage to the university medical departments." The success of Johns Hopkins had proved this. Hopkins was the perfect example of a school based on the principle of scientific medicine and the necessity that its faculty be intensely committed to research. The details of the Hopkins system became the foundation on which medical schools would remodel themselves as faculties within a university. The proprietary schools rapidly disappeared.

In their understandable eagerness to view their university affiliation as the foundation of a scientific approach to medical thought, the leaders of American medicine committed themselves to a course of action that would forever link education to research. In essence, they had made an irrevocable decision: the educational institution was also to be a research institution. A faculty dedicated to one would henceforth have to be dedicated to both. Never mind that the skills and personal qualities required in the two arenas were quite different; never mind that approximately half the faculty would, in addition, have to provide exemplary clinical care to patients, adding yet a third necessary talent to their already difficult responsibilities.

Instead of a chair, a medical professor would occupy a seat that has since become notorious for its unsteadiness: the now-famous three-legged stool of excellence in teaching, research, and clinical work. Sitting on it is akin to remaining mounted on three spirited horses at once. The rider is likely to find himself galloping furiously in all directions.

Of all the manifold problems afflicting the modern medical school, one of the most serious and least frequently addressed is the inherent inconsistency among its several aims. As admirable as each aim may be by itself, only a rare faculty can meet the highest standards in each. For professors in clinical disciplines such as internal medicine, surgery, and pediatrics, the problem has been aggravated in recent years by the necessity of increasing the patient population in order to guarantee the financial solvency of their departments.

If one is a clinician whose notion of a medical school is that it should be a place where young people come to learn how to take care of the sick, the most fundamental difficulty arises from the primacy of research. Since the 1960s, the level of medical investigation has become increasingly sophisticated, as the requirements of molecular and genetic studies have demanded an ever more meticulous understanding of laboratory and interpretive methodologies. Nowadays even clinical research is likely to involve a deep knowledge of such disciplines as statistics and epidemiology. With each passing decade, both students and faculty have become more engrossed in such laboratory and clinical studies. The decision to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

link education to research has evolved—because there are only so many hours in a day, and only so many days in a four-year course—into the decision that a medical school should be a highly specialized and compartmentalized institution. Some have even begun to characterize it as a trade school. The ideal of a liberal permeation by the wider university now seems more remote than ever.

Medical schools rarely promote teachers for teaching well, or for caring for (or even about) the sick. Their prestige rests on the number of NIH grants they receive and the nationally renowned scientists who grace their research wings. In the preclinical sciences, like molecular biology, genetics, and immunology, instruction often involves an overemphasis on the particular part of the field in which the teacher is working, and frequently on his or her own pet interests. Even in such seemingly "bedside" disciplines as surgery and internal medicine, the research these days is less likely to apply to direct patient care than to molecular-level phenomena. That's where the big discoveries, the big accolades, and the big bucks are.

Milton Winternitz had already recognized the oncoming tide of these phenomena in the 1920s. A distinguished scientist himself, he feared the future emphasis on laboratory science that he saw as engulfing the primary mission of the medical school. To stem it—to turn medicine's attention back to the sick patient in the hospital bed—he conceived of the Institute of Human Relations, a haven from academic medicine's determination to transform itself into an investigational and technological enterprise. There he would bring to bear all the forces of sociology, psychology, economics, industry, law, government, education, and public health, so that individual patients might be studied and treated as whole persons. No longer would Yale be content to turn out the kind of physician that Winternitz scorned as a mere "doctor-technician."

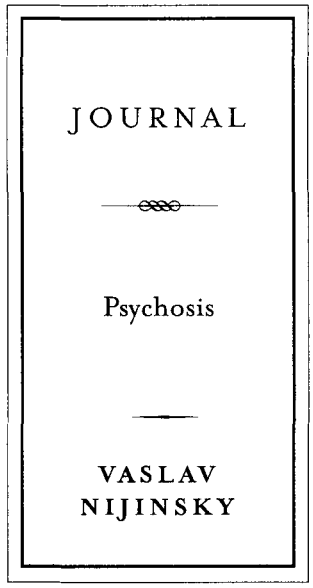
One can only guess how far the program might have gone. Aims were high; the inclusion of such disciplines as literature, philosophy, and history might have been the next step. As Winternitz saw it, the fragmentation of medical education would begin to break down, barriers between disciplines would crumble, and the increasing distance between doctor and patient would be narrowed. The Institute of Human Relations would be truly humane.

Winternitz recruited many powerful people in the university to his side. They traveled throughout the country to explain the Institute's plans to alumni and civic groups. Seven and half million dollars was donated, the building rose, and the façade was proudly inscribed with those seemingly indelible words. The dedication took place on May 9, 1931. A distinguished faculty had been gathered from various parts of the university, all committed to a collective effort.

It was not to be. Almost as soon as it started, the grand scheme began falling to pieces. Collaborators did not collaborate, slipping back instead into the old fragmentation; the departments of the medical school—always skeptical of diverting themselves into areas they saw as "soft"—kept themselves aloof; resentments arose over Winternitz's attempts to control space allocation and, increasingly, over what was perceived as his dictatorial attitude toward the entire enterprise. Within a few years, the Institute of Human Relations was no more. The faculty returned to its own parochial interests. Gone the way of the empire of Ozymandias, the great dream that a medical school could be integrated into the humanistic endeavor of a university had vanished.

It needs to be revived. The problems Winternitz was attempting to solve have become more urgent than they were seventy years ago. The expanding "scientization" of medicine has led, more and more, to the worsening dehumanization of medicine. It is time once again to address the role of medical education in dealing with "the manifold and various relations of the thoughtful individual person to the ever-changing world." Unless the liberating influence of the entire university can be brought to bear, we in the medical profession will continue to deserve—now more than ever before—the pejorative description of "doctor-technicians," better at curing than caring, better at understanding pathology than understanding the distressed men and women who come to us to be healed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



I went upstairs and went to my bed, but I took a notebook in order to write down everything I had experienced today. . . . I had experienced nothing but horrible things. . . . My wife sleeps next to me, and I am writing. My wife is now asleep, because her eyes are open. . . . She loves me with feeling today. Some day I will tell her that we must marry in feeling because I do not want to love without feeling. For now, I will leave it alone, because she is afraid of me.

I went out for a walk once, and it seemed to me that there was blood on the snow, and so I ran, following the trail. I had the impression that somebody had killed a man. . . . Then God forced me to go in the direction of the abyss, saying that a man was hanging there and had to be saved. I was afraid. I thought that the devil was tempting me just as he tempted Christ when He was on the mountain, saying, "Jump down, and I will believe in you." I was afraid, but after standing for a while, I felt a force that was drawing me in the direction of the abyss. I went to the abyss and then fell down, but was caught in the branches of a tree, which I had not noticed. That amazed me, and I thought it was a miracle. God wanted to test me. I understood Him and therefore wanted to disentangle myself, but He did not allow me to. I held on for a long time, but after a while I became afraid. God told me that I would fall if I let go of this branch. I let go of the branch, but did not fall. God said to me, "Go home and tell your wife that you are mad." I realized that God wished me well, and therefore I went home with the intention of breaking this news to her.

I liked Parisian tarts when I was with Diaghilev. He thought I went out for walks, but I was chasing tarts. . . . I looked for a long time because I wanted the girl to be healthy and beautiful. Sometimes I would look all day long and not find one, because I had no experience in looking for tarts. I made love to several tarts a day. . . . If my wife reads all this, she will go mad, for she believes in me. I lied to her when I said she was the first woman I made love to. I knew many others before my wife. They were simple and beautiful.

My wife is urging me to go to Zurich to see a nerve specialist in order to have my nervous system examined.

I like writing neatly, but I have a bad fountain pen. I received it as a present, and therefore I like this fountain pen. I will write with this fountain pen as long as God wills it. I feel that my hand is tired. The word "Ideal" is written on my pen, but my fountain pen is not ideal. . . . I have found a method for an ideal fountain pen, and therefore I will earn a lot of

The great ballet dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky made his fame with Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes from 1909 onward. He was also Diaghilev's lover. In 1913, soon after the premiere of his controversial ballet *The Rite of Spring*, Nijinsky suddenly married a Hungarian fan, Romola de Pulszky, whereupon Diaghilev fired him. Nijinsky may have been unstable from childhood. Now, unable to work, he gradually went insane. His diary, written in St. Moritz, Switzerland, in 1919, shortly before his first hospitalization, is being published in its first unexpurgated English edition in February by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Joan Acocella, the editor of *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*, selected and annotated these excerpts; the translation is by Kyril FitzLyon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

money, only I will ask for a patent. . . . I write one thing and think of another. I am God in man. I am what Christ felt. I am Buddha. I am a Buddhist and every kind of God. I know everyone. I am acquainted with everything. I pretend to be mad for my own purposes. I know that if everyone thinks I am a harmless madman, they will not be afraid of me. I do not like people who think that I am a madman who would harm people. I am a madman who loves people. My madness is love for people. I have told my wife that I have invented a pen that will bring me a lot of money, but she does not believe it. . . . The pen will be called God. I want to be called God, and not Nijinsky, and will therefore ask for this pen to be called God.

Nijinsky is deeply disturbed by the war, and though it has ended—the diary was written during the Paris Peace Conference—at times he does not seem to understand this. He admires the pacifist Woodrow Wilson and loathes David Lloyd George, England's aggressive prime minister, whom he identifies with Diaghilev. He fears that once his diary is published, with its condemnations of Lloyd George, the British leader will send someone to assassinate him.

The war has not stopped, because men think. I know how the war can be stopped. Wilson wants to stop the war, but people do not understand him. Wilson is not a dancer. Wilson is God in politics. I am Wilson. I am reasonable policy. Wilson wants reasonable policy, and therefore he does not like war. He did not want war, but the English forced him into it. He wanted to avoid taking part in the war. He is not for sale. I want to speak, but God will not let me. I wanted to give the name of a politician, but God will not let me, because he does not wish me harm. Lloyd George is a simple man, but he has great intelligence. His intelligence has destroyed his feeling, and therefore his policy has no reason in it. If he listened to Wilson, he would be able to stop the war. Lloyd George is a terrible man. Diaghilev is a terrible man. . . . They are eagles. They prevent small birds from living.

I am not afraid of death, and therefore murderers can follow me around as much as they like. I will give the murderer more money than he got from the man who wanted to kill me. I do not want my murderer's death, and therefore I ask, when I am murdered, that the murderer not be lynched or killed in any other way, because it is not his fault. A murderer goes to his death. Lloyd George is a murderer because he has killed millions of innocent people. I am one man in a million. I am not alone. I am a million, for I feel more than a million. Lloyd George will send murderers, and therefore I ask him to be careful.

Nijinsky is practicing "marital chastity," in accordance with the religious philosophy of Leo Tolstoy. In order to dissuade him from this, Romola may have encouraged her sister, Tessa, who was visiting at the time, to try to seduce Nijinsky.

Tessa looks at me with hatred. . . . Tessa thinks that no one understands her tricks. I have understood Tessa very well, because I have noticed that she flirts with me. She used to lie down on the bed in her underwear in order to excite my lust. She thinks she can excite lust with the help of silk panties. She wears small silk panties and thin camisoles in order to excite. I understand Tessa well. I know her tricks. These tricks are like those of a tiger that is waiting for its prey. I used to come into her room on purpose when she was naked. She did not feel shame in front of me. A woman brought up like a lady must feel shame in front of men. Tessa has seen many men, because she does not feel shame in front of them. . . . I am a man who breeds children with one woman. I am 29 years old. I love my wife, but not in order to breed children, but spiritually.

According to the evidence, Romola was conducting an affair with a local doctor, Hans Curt Frenkel, who at the same time was trying to "analyze" Nijinsky. Nijinsky does not seem to have known of the affair, yet he is suspicious of Frenkel. In the next passage he speaks alternately in his own voice and in the voice of God. As he writes, he imagines that Frenkel has entered the room and is staring at him.

Frenkel's talk is intellectual, so is my wife's. I am afraid of them both. I want to let them feel you. I know you must feel hurt. Your wife is suffering because of you. I do not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

want death, and therefore I resort to all kinds of tricks. I will not divulge my aim. Let them think you are an egoist. Let them put you in prison. I will free you because I know that you are mine. I do not like the intelligent Romola. I want her to leave you. I want you to be mine. . . . I know what you think. He is here and is looking at you intently. I want him to look at you. I do not want to turn around, because I feel his gaze. . . .

I know more than you do, and therefore I ask you not to turn around. I like Frenkel. Frenkel is a good man. I know your intentions. I want to carry them out, but you must suffer. Everyone will feel if they see your suffering. I knew he was upstairs. You are mistaken, for you felt me. I wanted you to feel that Dr. Frenkel was here. . . .

I love my wife and Dr. Frenkel equally. I am a man with an equal love. . . . Perhaps you will be put in prison for this book [the diary]. I will be with you because you love me. I cannot keep silent. I must speak. . . . I know men whose love never falters within them, and therefore they will not allow you to be committed anywhere. You will be free as a bird, for this book will be published in many thousands of copies. I want to sign "Nijinsky" for the sake of publicity, but my name is God. . . . Everything I write is a teaching essential to mankind.

Lunch is being served. Nijinsky does not want to eat. Romola is in another room, weeping.

I will not go to my wife, because the doctor does not want it. I will stay here and write. Let them bring me food here. I do not want to eat sitting at a table covered by a tablecloth. I am poor. I have nothing, and I want nothing. I am not weeping as I write these lines, but my feeling weeps. I do not wish my wife ill. I love her more than anyone. I know that if they separate us I will die of hunger. I am weeping. . . . I cannot restrain my tears, which are dropping on my left hand and my silk tie, but I do not want to restrain them. I will write a lot because I feel that I am going to be destroyed. I do not want destruction, and therefore I want her love. I do not know what I need, but I want to write.

My wife is afraid I may be writing things that are forbidden. She cries with real tears. I laugh at her weeping because I know the meaning of her weeping. I want to reassure her, but my hand goes on writing. I will continue about Wilson. Wilson is a human being, but Lloyd George is a beast. My wife is reading what I am writing. She is looking under my hand. I will tell her that if she wants to know before anyone else, she must learn to read Russian. I do not want her to read Russian, because I do not want her to know everything I write. I do not like one person knowing before anyone else. I will publish this book soon. I am not sure that I will publish it in Switzerland, because I think that the Swiss will prohibit it. I know that Lloyd Georgians or the Anglicans have detectives everywhere.

Nijinsky recalls his five-year relationship with Diaghilev and his earlier affairs.

I disliked Diaghilev, but I lived with him. I hated Diaghilev from the very first days I knew him, because I knew Diaghilev's power. . . . I was poor. I earned 65 roubles a month. Sixty-five roubles a month was not enough to feed my mother and myself. I was renting a small three-room apartment that cost 35–37 roubles a month. I liked music. I made the acquaintance of Prince Pavel Lvov, who introduced me to a Polish count. I have forgotten his name because this is how I want it. I do not want to offend the whole family, for I have forgotten his first name. This count bought me an upright piano. I did not like him. I liked Prince Pavel and not the Count. Lvov introduced me by telephone to Diaghilev, who invited me to come to the Hôtel de l'Europe, where he was staying. I hated him for his voice, which was too self-assured, but I went in search of luck. I found luck there because I immediately made love to him. I trembled like an aspen leaf. I hated him, but I put up a pretense, for I knew that my mother and I would starve to death.

I know geography because I have studied it. I do not like state frontiers, because I realize that the earth is one state. The earth is the head of God. God is fire in the head. I am alive as long as I have a fire in my head. My pulse is an earthquake. I am an earthquake.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I married by chance. I married in South America, and the wedding was in Rio de Janeiro. I was introduced to my wife on the ship *The Avon*. . . . I must say that I married without thinking. I loved her and loved her. I did not think of the future. I spent the money that I had saved with great difficulty. I used to give her roses that cost 5 francs apiece. I brought her these roses every day, twenty, thirty at a time. I loved giving her white roses. I felt flowers. I realized that my love was white and not red. Red roses frightened me. I was not a cowardly man, but I felt a lasting and passionate love. I loved her terribly. I gave her everything I could. She loved me. It seemed to me that I was happy. The first time I felt grief was three or five days after the marriage. I asked her to learn dancing, because for me dancing was the highest thing in the world after her. I wanted to teach her. I had taught no one, because I was afraid for myself. I wanted to teach her good dancing, but she became frightened and no longer trusted me. I wept and wept bitterly. I wept bitterly. Already I felt death. I realized that I had made a mistake, but the mistake was irreparable. I had put myself in the hands of someone who did not love me. I realized my mistake. My wife now loved me above anyone else, but she did not feel me. I wanted to leave, but felt that that was dishonest and remained with her. She did not love me much. She felt money and my success. She loved me for my success and the beauty of my body. She was cunning and made me keen on money. . . .

I did not want money. I wanted a simple life. I loved the theater, and I wanted to work. I worked hard, but later I lost heart because I noticed that I was not liked. I withdrew into myself. I withdrew so deep into myself that I could not understand people. I wept and wept.

Romola has summoned her mother, Emilia Markus, and Emilia's husband, Oscar Pardany, to St. Moritz from Budapest. Nijinsky fears, rightly, that the purpose of their trip is to help Romola take him to Zurich and hospitalize him.

I like the light of twinkling stars, not stars without twinkling. I know that twinkling stars are life and those that do not twinkle, death. I know what I have to do when a star twinkles at me. I know the meaning of untwinkling stars. My wife is an untwinkling star. I have noticed that many people do not twinkle. I weep when I feel that someone does not twinkle. I know what death is. Death is life extinguished. People who have lost their reason are called extinguished life. I too lacked reason, but when I stayed in St. Moritz, I understood, in my room, the whole truth. . . . I do not want to think, and therefore I live. I know that when my wife's mother comes, I will have to think a lot. My wife's mother is coming tomorrow at 11 o'clock in the morning.

Once Emilia and Oscar arrive, Nijinsky's mood blackens. He is tormented by thoughts of sex and violence. He sees dead soldiers.

Lust is a terrible thing. . . . I know that many German professors order people to procreate, because they want many soldiers. I know what a soldier is. I have seen many representations of them, and besides, I have a powerful imagination. I know about the killing of soldiers. I know their torments. In Hungary I saw trains with the German wounded. I saw their faces.

Nijinsky now discovers that Romola has moved out of their bedroom.

I went into the bedroom and when I went in I had a feeling of cold before I saw. Her bed had no pillows and was unmade. I went downstairs, having decided not to sleep. I wanted to write my impressions. I cannot write, because my body feels cold all over. . . .

My fingers are becoming numb. I want to say that she does not love me. . . . I know that people get used to grief, and I will get used to it too. I am afraid of getting used to grief, because I know that this is death. . . . Her mind is getting cold. . . . I am weeping. I am cold. I do not feel. I am dying. I am not God.

Nijinsky has been making drawings, often of great, staring eyes. Now that Oscar and Emilia have arrived, he has hidden the drawings, together with his "manuscripts," or diary.

I knew that I would not be understood and therefore took all these drawings off the wall of my room. I hid my manuscripts in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bottom half of the piano. I knew that nobody would understand my manuscripts, but I felt that Dr. Frenkel would send people to take my manuscripts and keep them for a while in order to have them translated. I did not want to show my manuscripts, because I was sure that Dr. Frenkel would not understand them and would take me for a madman. I was afraid for my wife and therefore hid the notebooks. I have hidden all my set designs because I feel they will not understand them. I will not hide the drawings, because they have seen them. I do not want to create ill will when my wife's mother is here, because I do not want her to take my wife away with her. . . . I have no money and was therefore afraid that I would be committed to a lunatic asylum. Oscar and other relatives of my wife's mother have shares in a lunatic asylum. . . . I am afraid of Oscar and Emma. They are both dead.

The nerves in my nose are calming down, but the nerves in my skull disturb me because I feel the blood draining from my head. My hair is moving, for I feel it. I ate a lot and therefore feel death. I do not want death and therefore am asking God to help me.

I am going to Zurich. . . . Everyone is feeling nervous.

I feel the suffocation of the earth. The earth is suffocating. It produces earthquakes. I know what an earthquake is. I know that everybody hates earthquakes and asks God that there be no more earthquakes. I want earthquakes because I know that the earth breathes. I know that people do not understand earthquakes and that they therefore blame God. People do not understand that they themselves have started earthquakes. I know that many people will say that earthquakes are produced by earthquakes, for the earth has not cooled down yet. I know the mistakes people make, and therefore I must say that an earthquake is the result of a suffocating earth. People will probably tell me that I am mistaken, because I have not studied the earth. I will say that I have studied the earth because I feel it and do not think. I know that the earth is a living thing. I know that the earth was a sun. I know that all other stars that twinkle are suns. I know that the moon and other planets, for example, Mars, are not suns. I know that there are no men on Mars. I know that people will be afraid of me because I speak of things I have not seen. I must say that I can see without eyes. I am feeling. I feel. I know that the blind will understand me if I explain to them that eyes are an obsolete thing. I will say that people on Mars have no eyes. That on Mars people live with love and that they do not need eyes, because they have no sun. I know that all astronomers will exclaim that Nijinsky is a stupid man and does not understand astronomy. I will say that all astronomers are stupid. Astronomers have invented telescopes to explore the atmosphere. Astronomers are the most boring people in the world. I know that I will be told that astronomers are god. I will say that astronomy is nonsense. I know I will be told I am insane because I speak of things that I do not understand. I know that I understand. I am the spirit in man that carries Nijinsky's body. . . . I know there are no people on Mars because Mars is a frozen body. Mars was like the Earth, but many billions of years ago. The Earth will also be like Mars, but in several hundred years' time. I feel that the Earth is suffocating, and therefore I ask everyone to abandon factories and obey me. I know what is needed for the salvation of the earth. I know how to light a stove, and therefore I will be able to light up the earth.

Nijinsky, Romola, Oscar, and Emilia left for Zurich on March 4, 1919, to see the "nerve specialist" Dr. Eugene Bleuler, an expert on schizophrenia. (He had invented the term.) According to Romola's account, Bleuler met with Nijinsky for ten minutes, then showed him out of the office, showed Romola in, and told her that her husband was incurably insane. (Bleuler's notes describe Nijinsky as "a confused schizophrenic with mild manic excitement.") When Romola returned to the waiting room, Nijinsky looked up at her and said, "Femmka *[little wife], you are bringing me my death warrant."*

Nijinsky was hospitalized the next day, and soon had a violent psychotic break. He spent the next thirty-one years—more than half his life—as a chronic schizophrenic, most of the time mute. In 1950, aged sixty-one, he died quietly of kidney failure.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

• B O O K S •

REREADING

Stead Made Me Do It

MICHAEL UPCHURCH

The phone call would come at 3:00 A.M., and the town car would materialize fifteen minutes later: a sleek and murmurous vehicle that was a most unlikely sight on my Brooklyn side street. The backseat was as soft as the bed I had just abandoned, and the route the uniformed driver followed was always the same: through downtown Brooklyn, over the Brooklyn Bridge, into the financial district.

One night stands out from the rest.

The driver this time was an older man, an Eastern European émigré who spoke hardly any English. As we rounded the corner of Fourth and Atlantic, I saw a trio of figures struggling under a streetlamp. A woman in a bronze minidress and platform heels swung a trapezoid-shaped handbag to fend off two assailants wearing the 1980s equivalent of zoot suits. I was half-dead with sleep and there seemed no way to focus on the sights cordoned off by the window. They demanded response, didn't they?

But, no, they had already floated past.

To the driver I said, "I think she was having trouble."

He muttered unintelligibly.

"Don't you have a radio or something—to call the police?"

"No radio."

We were on the bridge approach by now—and then on the bridge itself. In the near distance was a cliff wall of lights.

Finally, devolving into the narrow backstreets of lower Manhattan, we arrived at our destination: the financial printing firm where I had worked for the previous two years. It was here that I typed in the last-minute edits that lawyers cubbyholed elsewhere in the building made on business documents about to be filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington, D.C.

Up the elevator. Into the composition room. Instructions came from my colleague Alba, who had already done four hours of overtime and had a car downstairs waiting to take her home to Queens: "It's lighter now, but they're still making changes. You'll have to watch for page runs."

A go-between came in with the latest page proofs for a People Express annual report.

Call the police? But that was ten minutes ago, in another dimension.

People Express was not doing well. People Express was selling another airplane in order to meet its interest payments.

There was a particular reason I had taken this job, and it was a literary reason. Nine years earlier, as a bookstore clerk in North Carolina, I had come across a novel on the remainder tables that impressed me with its heft and enticed me with its title: *House of All Nations.* The author was Christina Stead, an Australian who moved to Paris in the late twenties, worked in a bank there, and later lived in the U.S. and England.

In 1976, I was twenty-two years old, with a peripatetic childhood behind me (England, Holland, New Jersey) and an admiration for the ironic and the cosmopolitan in fiction, as

Michael Upchurch is a critic who lives in Seattle. He has written four novels, *Jamboree, Air, The Flame Forest,* and *Passive Intruder.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

well as for the lyrical, the gothic, the unhinged. *House of All Nations,* it turned out, would come through on all counts—but I didn't know that yet. Instead, it was the gorgeous Gilbert Stone jacket art on the 1972 reissue that initially caught my eye. It showed a shadowy, bowler-hatted banker and, behind him, a somber mausoleum of granite and gold. The novel's eight hundred closely printed pages also exuded an appeal, making a sumptuous flopping sound as I thumbed through them. And then there were the rambunctious titles of the book's 104 "scenes" (Stead's preference over "chapters"): "He Travels Fast But Not Alone," "Whoopee Party," "The Man with Cunard-colored Eyes," "No Money in Working for a Living." How could I resist?

I bought the book, took it to the beach, and quickly came to a realization: I lacked the wherewithal to read it. The early specialization of my British high school and university education meant I had never had the slightest brush with finance, and all the novel's fiscal wheeling and dealing went way over my head. What, in this context, did "put" and "call" mean, or "long" and "short"? What exactly were "margins" and "options"?

Yet the characters' money talk was mesmerizing—for even though they all dealt in the same arcane vocabulary, each used it differently, revealing different rhythms of mind, quirks of temperament, degrees of paranoia, frenzies of power hunger. Besides, it wasn't all business. South American playboys, cynical countesses, quixotic Communists, scheming harridans, and blackmailing drug fiends all played roles, whether major or minor, in this jittery portrait of sleazy Parisian bankers making money off the Crash. Perhaps that was what kept me reading, for I loved fiction with a vivid sense of history—and *House of All Nations,* set in 1931–1932, made you feel you were *there,* riding the downward spiral of economic collapse, buffeted by billowing war clouds each step of the way.

Other fiction I had read or was soon to read—Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End,* Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum,* Elsa Morante's *History: A Novel*—had given me my sense of a Europe defined by war. But nothing else had zeroed in so closely on between-wars queasiness. Why had I only vaguely heard of Stead? Why was *The Man Who Loved Children* the one book repeatedly named as her masterpiece? How could anyone relegate *House of All Nations*—a novel that chews up and spits out the spirit of a whole decade—to ancillary status in the Stead canon?

I was overreacting. *House* is generally ranked a close second to Stead's best-known novel. Still, when I went on to read *The Man Who Loved Children* in order to make the comparison for myself, it disappointed me even as I acknowledged its brute force. It seemed merely human, whereas *House* was diabolic. *The Man Who Loved Children* portrayed familiar territory: family misery. *House* entered realms and harnessed writerly powers I could only begin to imagine.

And there was this, too: Stead, a writer sometimes saddled with the label "feminist," wrote more knowingly and incisively about businessmen than any other writer, male or female, I had ever encountered.

In 1979, I moved from North Carolina to New York, and in 1980 my first novel was accepted in two weeks flat. That same spring, in the space of three months I wrote a rough draft for a second book I liked much better, a workplace tale, written under Henry Green's influence as much as Stead's. It would take five years to place. Nothing much happened with either novel. I was still working in bookstores.

In 1983 Christina Stead died at age eighty. I had the flu that week, and when I called in sick, one of my fellow clerks assumed this was just my excuse to stay home and mourn. That was also the year I realized that if I didn't start making more money soon, I wouldn't be able to survive the city's skyrocketing rents.

I took a word-processing course and became, briefly, an "administrative assistant" (in other words, a secretary). Then a typesetting job at R. R. Donnelley's financial printing division opened up and I took it. I had heard we were living in a speculation-crazed decade, and this seemed my chance to observe it firsthand. I knew I lacked a head for numbers, but I thought that frequent handling of business documents might help me to develop one—whereupon I could write my own novel about finance and become the Christina Stead of the eighties.

Because most documents were fine-tuned overnight for filing with the SEC the next morning, I worked crazy hours—usually 4:00

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

P.M. to midnight. Even on day shift, there was a chance that I'd be called in early—hence the 3:00 A.M. phone calls.

I saw lots of documents. I was required to sign oaths promising that I would not take advantage of my insider's access to do any insider trading. I signed—and despaired. The idea of my doing insider trading was laughable. Apart from the obvious death-throe symptoms of People Express, nothing registered. I began to grow quite fond of certain typefaces and I liked doing layout for cover pages, but the *content* of what I was typing was mind-numbing.

Nevertheless, there was some Stead-like local color that came with the job. During another one of my "3:00 A.M. specials" (as I began to think of them), the car-service driver voiced his worries to me, saying he knew full well he was shipping drugs along with documents to legal types up and down the town, but he didn't know whether to believe his bosses when they told him he was in no danger of being arrested, if caught. (Arrangements had been made, they said.) And once, during a lull in office activity, a colleague and I had fun trading information on who in the office did cocaine ("But he's a health nut!") and who was gay ("But he's a nice Italian boy!").

So far, so good. There was rumored drug use in *House of All Nations*—and at least one homosexual.

On another night, an envelope addressed to a customer service representative turned out to be full of white powder. A receptionist, thinking the package contained page proofs, had opened it. The addressee was fired, and we worried terribly over how he would pay for his new house and new baby.

No problem: he was hired by a competitor the very next week. The utter lack of consequences was in perfect keeping with Stead.

None of this helped me with my central problem, however—that I was simply too stupid to discern the action cloaked in the language of the blue sky memorandums and prospectuses that passed through my hands.

In the end, I thoroughly messed up my finance-novel research by quitting my job a full year before the 1987 Black Monday crash. Stead, perhaps jealously guarding her turf from beyond the grave, took some of the blame here, for while visiting Seattle in 1985 I had come across a copy of her posthumous collection, *Ocean of Story*, at Elliott Bay Book Company. The book was nowhere to be found in any of the cramped New York bookstores I frequented—and so, partly on the strength of this, I moved out West in 1986.

I had all Stead's published books in my library by then, but had begun to realize I could never meaningfully emulate her. In fact, I had given up trying to understand even my own paltry finances. At tax time, I turned everything over to an accountant.

I review books on a weekly basis, so the ultimate luxury—one I am unable to indulge in very often—is to reread: to revisit a book to see how time has treated it, how memory has distorted it, or how my own passing years have cast a new light on it.

It was an odd sensation, more than two decades after first encountering *House of All Nations*, to look again at a book that had shaped me in such serious and absurd ways, for it unnervingly revealed how much one can't know, or can't remember, about one's own reading and writing.

There were minor things, such as the carnival festivity of Stead's vocabulary: words like "canoodle" and "tatterdemalion." Could I first have come across them here? I've certainly used them since, in ways that begin to feel uncomfortably derivative. Or punctuation: I thought I got my exclamation points from Paul Theroux! But, no, they're here too—so perhaps Stead's punctuation whetted an appetite that Theroux merely continued to satisfy.

On a deeper level, Stead's work has an appealingly amoral aesthetic that I now see must have been a revelation to me when I first read it. Henry James may have paved the way here, for I remember my relief when I read him at nineteen and realized how little use he had for "lessons," how he focused purely on the dynamics of the psyche and of social situations. But James is a meticulous analyst, while Stead presents her characters almost without comment. Instead, she simply lets them announce themselves, reveal themselves, and, as often as not, sink themselves. In a 1982 interview, she explained:

> I'm interested in people here and now. I have not even any moral views. Maybe,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> within myself I think "You shouldn't do that," but I would never write such a thing, or express it openly, because I was brought up by a naturalist [her father, David Stead], and you don't say to a snail, "You bad snail, you mustn't cross my garden path" or anything, do you? A snail crosses your garden path and he leaves a little silver trail, which is very nice of him, and it's very pretty and that's all. A sea-anemone puts out its beautiful little tentacles making it look like a flower and it catches things out of the water and eats them. You don't say, "You bad sea-anemone, you shouldn't eat those live things," do you? They *do* eat them and otherwise they wouldn't be alive and be like a lovely little flower.

In *House of All Nations,* it is this very lack of judgment that, in collusion with her giddy, caustic humor, allows Stead to probe so deeply. The book may feel like an indictment, but it's not an indictment of particular characters—it's an indictment of a society in economic anarchy that is heading inexorably toward war. Her characters, as they see it, are just making the best of a bad hand.

The sheer number of those characters—the 1938 edition supplies a cast list of more than 130—is crucial to the novel's method and moral outlook. Hazel Rowley, in her admirable *Christina Stead: A Biography,* cites a lecture that Stead gave on "the many-charactered novel" in June 1939, one year after *House of All Nations* was published. Rowley writes:

> Stead suggested that this was the ideal form of novel for a world in chaos in which the individual felt small. No writer could take sides when dealing with such a large array of characters: the writer "is in the position of an impartial, disabused and merry god" and the reader has to "draw his own conclusions from the diverse material, as from life itself."

It is this sense of having to draw your own conclusions that, to my mind, makes *House of All Nations* more satisfying than *The Man Who Loved Children,* where you know exactly whom you're rooting for: the put-upon housewife, the gifted but dowdy adolescent daughter.

There is also this difference between *The Man Who Loved Children* and *House of All Nations:* the former explores subject matter that was foisted on Stead by her own troubled girlhood, while the latter explores subject matter that, in a bid for freedom, she sought out.

In March of 1928, Christina Stead, twenty-six years old and filled with writerly aspirations, left her native Australia for England. Two months later, she walked into the London offices of Strauss & Co., a grain exchange business, and was hired as a secretary by its investment manager, William Blech, an American of German Jewish origin—and a Marxist to boot. By February of 1929, the two were lovers. (Blech, married, would take twenty-three years to obtain a divorce from his first wife, before marrying Stead in 1952.) That same month the couple moved to Paris, where both worked for a private American firm known as the Travelers' Bank, the creation of a charismatic American Army Air Service veteran, Bertrand Coles Neidecker. By 1931, Stead was making business trips to London for Neidecker and had her own "plushly furnished" office in the bank. Her job duties were vaguely defined and left plenty of time for fiction writing. She was also in an ideal position for a novelist: that of a fly on the wall.

That year, of course, was not a good one for banking. But Neidecker, with his charm, and Blech, with his hard work, managed to keep the bank afloat in perilous circumstances for another four years. In July of 1935, Neidecker skedaddled to New York, where he was arrested for fraud, and the bank was closed. Blech, who had resigned in May, was nevertheless implicated in the affair and also landed up in New York—with Stead and his mother in tow. Neidecker was subsequently freed on bail until the trial. Stead met with him in October and asked permission to write a novel about the Travelers' Bank. He gave her his blessing to write "everything she knew," Rowley tells us. "He probably never imagined that she knew as much as she did."

Stead proceeded with relish. In June 1936 a business venture of Blech's took the couple to Spain, where she commenced writing. In mid-July, the Spanish Civil War broke out and Stead and Blech were on the run: first to Antwerp, then to London. By October, Stead had submitted a draft to her publisher, and by the summer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of 1937 her revisions were complete. In the meantime, she and Blech had left London for southern France, before giving up on Europe altogether and heading back to New York.

Appalling conditions under which to write a novel—or were they? The tinderbox existence Stead and Blech were leading, with its multiple threats of lawsuits and war, seems only to have heightened the blend of bedlam and tension that crackles on the pages of *House of All Nations.*

In the novel, the Travelers' Bank becomes the Banque Mercure; Bertrand Coles Neidecker becomes Jules Simla Bertillon, a "hummingbird of rumor, fancy, and adventures"; and William Blech becomes Michel Alphendéry, Jules's right-hand man, an Alsatian Jew with a gift for moneymaking and a yearning to commit all his energies to the Communist Party as soon as he has steered Jules into calmer financial waters.

A host of characters swarms around this central pair, the most memorable of them being Henri Léon, a Romanian-born grain merchant. Jewish, promiscuous, and wildly inarticulate (one of his fractured monologues is described as an "elliptic hurricane"), Léon turns out to have a heart almost as big as Alphendéry's. His outline of his brilliantly profitable and strangely altruistic "wheat schematism"—which will give Yankee capitalism a much-needed shot in the arm *and* help Soviet Russia carry out its latest five-year plan—is one of the book's high points.

Undoubtedly it was the exuberant cynicism of this and other set pieces that appealed to me when I first read the novel. But there's more here than easy skepticism to appeal to a young reader—for a shimmering veil of myth plays over the nitty-gritty of greed and blackmail, especially in the depiction of Jules and the bank. Jules is, variously, superstitious and hardheaded, debonair and tantrum-prone. He is "slender, arch, and very beautiful," in the eyes of one bank employee. "'Tis pity he's a banker," says another. "He's only made to be a flier, a dancer—a messenger of the gods." Jules's own estimate of himself: "I'm just a gilded pickpocket and, believe me, a pickpocket has to have twinkling ankles."

In other words, he's an incarnation of wing-footed Mercury, the god who lends the bank its name. There seem to be no limits to the facets of his character, from the quibbling wisecracker ("What's the use of being rich if you can't be crazy?") to the driven *directeur* on the verge of a nervous breakdown ("I want highflying cash, beautiful cash, in platoons, in platoons, zooming; I want it big, rich, and plentiful, and all mine"). This, with more than four hundred pages still to go!

Jules, while vivid, isn't solid: "He took out his hat and coat and wrapped himself elegantly in them. He always had the curious appearance of being less material than the rest of mankind, part of him seemed always to belong to the chiaroscuro of a room, to the dark substance of lampposts in a street. When he moved amongst the pillars downstairs it was almost impossible to see him clearly." The bank is no less spectral. It's a "confidence trick," Jules frankly admits. Alphendéry puts it more poetically, seeing it as a "phantom bank" and, later, as a "strange palace of illusion, temptation, and beauty."

The periodic threats to Jules and Alphendéry by stock-market fluctuations, parisitical "friends" of the bank, and Jules's own erratic behavior sustain the tension over a remarkably prolonged narrative. Rowley tells us that Stead's editor wanted trims in the novel, and in certain scenes one can see his point. An early chapter on Alphendéry's Communist circle reads opaquely, even though its rhetoric is undercut by Alphendéry's own wryly voiced deprecation of spouted dogma. (By contrast, a later scene set in the same milieu, in which Alphendéry teaches a night class on economics to exhausted and Depression-bewildered factory workers, is deeply moving.)

Elsewhere, two paragraphs of untranslated French and German ring alarm bells, since these characters have been doing quite well, thank you, speaking an English that sounds Latinate or Teutonic, as required. But if 30 or 40 pages out of 787 don't work, who can complain? Jules's tirades may seem repetitious, but their cumulative impact is needed to give a full picture of him as he is in turn humored, chided, lambasted, and, by the end of the book, fondly remembered.

A second reading confirms how well assembled the book is, how deftly Stead juggles her vast cast and her many narrative strands,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and how clearly she keeps a subplot's pivotal details before the reader over a stretch of five hundred pages or more. A second reading also reveals a vein of the book that somehow escaped my notice the first time around, or else had faded from memory: the finely shaded and loving tribute it pays to European and Levantine Jewry. Stead was a third-generation atheist of Protestant extraction, but her devotion to Blech was instrumental here. As Rowley puts it, "Blech was proud of his Jewishness; so was Stead." More than half the main characters in *House* are Jewish, and they compose a rich mosaic of personalities and types—some rascally, some generous, some observers of their faith, others ebulliently cynical.

Everywhere there is a sense that an intrinsic part of European character is being squeezed into an impossible corner. Stead had no way of imagining the particulars of the death-camp horrors in store. Yet she, like her characters, sensed something awful, just over the horizon, with a conviction approaching clairvoyance.

Mixed in with this salute to a roaming, cosmopolitan Jewish culture is Stead's palpable love for Michel Alphendéry—a reflection, no doubt, of her love for William Blech. Alphendéry lends the book a warmth that spills over into many of its characters, despite their shenanigans. Only one other portrait in her fiction is so affectionate: that of Edward Massine in *The People with the Dogs,* another man-about-town deeply divided in nature—not between political credo and personal loyalty, but between general love of his fellow creatures and fear of a particular romantic commitment. (It may be worth noting here that the distinguishing characteristic of Stead villains and villainesses is not their evil intentions but their utterly *undivided* natures—a delusional certainty of self that prevents them from questioning their actions, no matter how transparently destructive those actions might be.)

A last minor point: how, the first time around, could I have missed the distinctly homoerotic terms in which these wheeler-and-dealers' scheming and subterfuges are described? If ever a writer pinpointed the way a businessman of a certain type sees women as merely decorative and discardable, while male colleagues embody the central passion of his life, it is Stead. True, this can be seen as standard business-world misogyny, but there's something else going on here. Midway through the book, for instance, a millionaire's henchman named Davigdor Schicklgrüber—a self-proclaimed idiot who is cannier than he admits about the money he handles—traipses through Paris banking circles, and the author has maximum fun with him: "No athletic beauty married to an invalid, no youth of sixteen, no debonair valetudinarian in a low vaudeville show, no dowager in pink organdie at Nice, ever felt the desires that rich men felt when Davigdor passed their way."

This lust for Davigdor, admittedly, approaches burlesque. But the wayward beauty of Jules repeatedly enchants the book's male characters as often as the female, and works on the reader, too, as one of the key lures of the novel.

One benefit of learning your own limits as a writer is reaching the point where, in reading a book, you recognize straight off you can't make use of it—so you simply sit back and savor an author who, like an acrobat or a silversmith or a high-C soprano, does things you will never, with all the training and practice in the world, be able to do.

Clearly, *House of All Nations* does plenty of things I'll never be able to do. For a start, it catches me up passionately in a subject matter that, on the surface, I have no interest in as a reader and no talent for as a writer. (Surely this is one definition of a great book.) It shows me that in the right hands even the most unpromising topics—wheat shipments, letters of credit—can give rise to fictional wizardry.

For the longest time, I have to admit, the book misled me. It was a holy grail, a talisman, a reference point, and I embraced it the same way I've stepped aboard the wrong train, eager to begin my journey but headed in the wrong direction. I remain in awe of *House of All Nations,* knowing I'm not likely to pull off anything like it.

But after all, there's no need; it's already been done.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Book Is Here to Stay

ALEX SOOJUNG-KIM PANG

THE EVOLUTION OF THE BOOK
By Frederick Kilgour. Oxford University Press. $35.

AVATARS OF THE WORD: FROM PAPYRUS TO CYBERSPACE
By James O'Donnell. Harvard University Press. $24.95.

In the early nineteenth century, naturalists seeking to explain how the earth developed were grouped into two camps. On one side were the catastrophists, who argued that massive, onetime events like the biblical deluge were the instruments that wrote the earth's history. On the other side stood the uniformitarians, who insisted that ordinary, everyday forces like erosion, earthquakes, and wind could explain the modern state of the planet.

Those seeking to make sense of the impact of the Internet and CDs on publishing, writing, and reading likewise fall into two camps. The catastrophist (or perhaps more accurately, apocalyptic) school, inspired by poststructuralist literary theory and early experiments with hypertext, argues that electronic publishing will upend our notions of authorship, reading, and literature. It posits a future of self-deconstructing texts, free of the commercial fetters of publishers or copyright regulations, endlessly reassembled by ironic and playful readers connected to global computer networks. In this world, the physical book is as quaint as the horse-drawn carriage. The uniformitarian view holds that the growth of electronic media from print is one more transition in the history of printing and communication, similar to the shift from oral to literate culture, from hieroglyphics to alphabet, from papyrus scroll to codex book, or from hand-written to mechanically printed book. Changes will come, but they won't be so dramatic, or so jarring. Both Frederick Kilgour's *Evolution of the Book* and James O'Donnell's *Avatars of the Word* consult the history of the book to shed light on its future, and are thus firmly in the uniformitarian camp.

Kilgour surveys the history of writing and printing from Mesopotamian times to the present. Adopting the "punctuated equilibrium" evolutionary model proposed by Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge, he divides the history of the book into seven evolutionary steps. The first occurs around 2500 B.C., with the development of clay tablets in Mesopotamia. This early medium combined an abundant natural resource (clay) with a writing system recently developed from an older system of tokens. The second step comes five hundred years later in Egypt, with the first use of the papyrus roll, on which scribes could write more quickly and easily, and which was easier to handle, store, and transport. The codex book, which appears in the second century A.D., marks another evolutionary jump. The fourth begins in the thirteenth century, with the invention of word spacing, pagination, and indexing, and culminates around 1450 with Gutenberg's printing press. Gutenberg's system remained unchanged in its essentials until the nineteenth century, when steam-powered presses appeared. Freed from the limits imposed by human strength and endurance, capable of printing on both sides of a sheet, they turned out thousands of pages per hour, supplying the books, newspapers, and magazines that made the printed word into a mass-market commodity. The last two shifts have occurred since World War II: photocomposition and modern printing, which replaced cast type, and now electronic publishing.

Anyone accustomed to thinking of the

Alex Soojung-Kim Pang is a historian of science and senior editor at the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* who writes frequently on electronic publishing and new media issues.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"information age" as a modern phenomenon will benefit from Kilgour's "*longue durée*": the struggle to produce, distribute, and preserve information, it turns out, is part of the history of civilization. *The Evolution of the Book* also gives readers a sense of how revolutions in printing are the products of accumulated improvements in technologies and processes, not magic bullets. Gutenberg's printing press was really a combination of several small but crucial innovations; modern offset printing systems rely on machines invented in the late 1800s and early 1900s, improved upon between the two world wars, and brought together only in the last few decades.

Sometimes this richness of technical detail yields a narrative that reads somewhat like a reference book, and it also closes off opportunities to explore the social and intellectual history of the book. But even readers who find one section too brisk or simplistic will learn from others, and those who find fault with the book's approach will still benefit from it. Besides, criticizing synthetic works for the nuances they gloss over or approaches they don't take is like criticizing a Monet for not looking like a microphotograph. It is more useful to ask what new avenues *Evolution of the Book* opens, what opportunities it creates for its successors. Three main avenues suggest themselves.

First, a closer examination of the interplay among different technological developments would clarify the utility of the punctuated equilibrium approach. To me, the history of printing after 1800 looks like one continuous flood of improvements in inks, presses, papermaking, illustration technologies, bookbinding, and marketing and distribution. Nor is it clear how writing technologies (i.e., the typewriter, word processor, or even that late, great nineteenth-century technology, the fountain pen) affected either the content or the production of books and other kinds of publications. Second, a global perspective that considered the literary cultures of the non-Western world as well as of Europe (which adopted Chinese paper and Indian numerals via the Islamic world) would let us better understand the conditions that encouraged innovation in print culture and technology. Kilgour argues that a "societal need for information" by economic, ecclesiastical, or civil institutions, together with technological and organizational creativity, is necessary for innovations in printing to occur and take hold. It would be useful to examine this model in China, which developed block printing five centuries before it found its way to the West, or in Korea, which had movable type before Gutenberg, or in the princely courts of India and South Asia, which learned about printing presses from missionaries and merchants. Certainly an imperial bureaucracy like China's, or an economic system as complex as the Indian Ocean trading network (which stretched from Mozambique to the Moluccas), had as high a demand for information technology as fifteenth-century Europe. Knowing more about the global history of information will let us better understand our current global information age and predict its future.

Finally, we need to give more attention to the interplay of technological change, culture, and ideas. Some of the best monographs on the history of the book, like Robert Darnton's *Literary Underground of the Old Regime* and Alvin Kernan's *Samuel Johnson and the Impact of Print,* examine the deep play among technological, economic, and cultural change, and show how the printer's shop, the bookseller's marketplace, and learned circles could interact, influencing the attractiveness of new technologies, ideas about intellectual property and the economics of print, and the relations between author and reader. We could learn a great deal about the future of book culture if we knew how readers of papyrus rolls reacted to the codex book, or how authors expert in the ways of court culture managed the transition to the capitalist marketplace of letters. This would be especially valuable because debates over "the future of the book" are often debates over the future of book culture. The disappearance of the Xerox course packet, aircraft repair manual, or mail-order catalogue would evoke no tears; even the near extinction of the printed encyclopedia has inspired fewer laments than one might have expected. What really worries some of us is the prospect of a world without crisp Sunday afternoons spent browsing at such memorable bookstores as the Seminary Co-op, or Cody's, or the Strand; of college years in which chat rooms replace Norton anthologies;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and of evenings in which on-demand television replaces favorite novels read in book-lined living rooms.

James O'Donnell's *Avatars of the Word* demonstrates the potential of this third approach. The book ranges widely, from the world of Socrates to the modern university, but its core is a study of the world of early Latin Christianity, when the papyrus roll was replaced by the codex book. Central to the acceptance of the book and the development of book culture was the rise of Christianity. As O'Donnell memorably puts it, "Christianity was the high-tech religion of late antiquity, using the written word resourcefully to create and shape itself." Small, easily concealed books were an appropriate technology for a mobile, persecuted religion. The geographical diffusion of Christianity also encouraged the adoption of the book, as parchment could be made from locally available animal skins rather than Egyptian papyrus. By the fourth century, the written word was a powerful vehicle of faith, and a few brilliant figures—Augustine, most notably—emerge as remarkable not only for what they wrote, but for recognizing and exploiting the power of the new medium. By the end of the fifth century, 90 percent of written works were produced as books rather than as scrolls, and books touched every aspect of Christianity: scholars pored over books of the Bible, monastic rules scripted the lives of monks, and liturgical manuals formalized and standardized religious ceremonies throughout Europe.

The greatest virtue of *Avatars of the Word* is its strong suggestion that although the digital world will be different, it will not be alien. The history of the book in Latin Christendom is a story of its endless adaptability, as it proves equally useful—in very different ways—to fugitives, abbots, and frontier bishops. O'Donnell also argues that nonlinear methods of reading, often touted as the special province of postmodernists, are actually as old as the book itself. Indeed, O'Donnell notes, "the codex page lent itself admirably to nonlinear access." Likewise, the library, another kind of "avatar" of the word, was designed "to make knowledge available to nonlinear access in as many ways as possible." Further, the codex book (and later, the printed book) was first the repository of traditional works, rather than literature that exploited the medium's opportunities. Only later did the experience of reading—and conceptions of writing—change with the introduction of new features like word spacing. The same was true of the printing press, which in its first decades churned out familiar and popular works. (Today history repeats itself. News Web sites republish wire service articles, while CD publishers often begin with a previously published book and add new material to it.) Even in "Augustine Today"—a chapter in which O'Donnell brings his study up to current times, sketching a world of on-line scholarship that exploits the opportunities provided by hyperlinking, global on-line discussion, and access to primary documents and archival material—the picture that emerges is one of a life of the mind pursued with the same vigor and standards as in the past. It makes both technological fetishism and Luddism seem, well, beside the point.

So what do *Avatars of the Word* and *Evolution of the Book* tell us about the near future of the book and literary culture? The idea that understanding the past can help us make sense of the present is a commonplace that has more subscribers than real practitioners. Most historians are smart enough to suggest that the future spins out of the past and to leave predictions to others. Still, certain patterns are clear.

A small number of printed works will be completely replaced by their electronic counterparts. The encyclopedia market has already been transformed by CDs and the Internet, and the era of printed encyclopedias is drawing to a close. Some large technical and legal databases could follow the same path. But extinction will be the exception, not the rule. Printed and electronic works are going to coexist for a long time. Indeed, the development of electronic publishing in the 1990s is only the latest chapter in the digitization of the publishing industry. The computerization of writing, editing, typesetting, and printing revolutionized publishing between the 1960s and the 1980s and created a vast database of electronic books and journals. As Kilgour points out, "of the six processes of Gutenberg and offset technology only one . . . is the same in both, whereas in the five related processes of offset and electronic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

book technologies four are the same." What is most radical about today's situation is that readers can now handle digital files: the Web browser substitutes for the printed book. Print will continue to be a viable output device, and electronic publications will continue to bear a family resemblance to printed works, just as Gutenberg's Bible combined new technology with the skills of experienced craftsmen. Those books that do not already exist in electronic back files, or are not digitized, will disappear. Virtually all of the ancient works we possess were copied into codex form during late antiquity or the Middle Ages; works that remained on papyrus vanished. Anyone who has searched in vain for a record album, only to find that it hasn't been converted to a CD, has seen this process at work today. Likewise, the culture of the book—the commercial, social, and personal worlds that we participate in and build for ourselves—will change, but it will survive, thanks to its vibrancy, its adaptability, and the vast number of institutions supporting it. Libraries show no signs of disappearing: instead, they are retooling to accommodate electronic catalogues and provide patrons with access to specialized databases. In the same spirit, cafés—the bastions of public culture from Berkeley to Cambridge—are wedging Internet workstations between the chess tables and the espresso machines.

My final prediction is the easiest. In the future there will be more books (or CDs or electronic books) on the future of the book. Rather than follow the apocalyptic line, they will look like, and owe much to, *Avatars of the Word* and *Evolution of the Book*. It is worth remembering that in the struggle over the earth's history, the uniformitarians won big: Charles Darwin was their ultimate convert and ultimate champion. The history of the book awaits its Darwin; perhaps Kilgour and O'Donnell will be its Lyell and Huxley.

NEW AUTHORS
PUBLISH YOUR WORK
ALL SUBJECTS CONSIDERED
Fiction, Biography, Religious, Poetry, Children's.
AUTHORS WORLDWIDE INVITED.
WRITE OR SEND YOUR MANUSCRIPT TO
MINERVA PRESS
2 OLD BROMPTON ROAD, LONDON SW7 3DQ, ENGLAND

Addicted to Violence

MURDER MOST FOUL: THE KILLER AND THE AMERICAN GOTHIC IMAGINATION
By Karen Halttunen. Harvard University Press. $29.95.

MAYHEM
By Sissela Bok. Addison-Wesley. $22.

Reviewed by AMY L. BLAIR

The recent spate of shootings of schoolchildren, by schoolchildren, at American schools has sent editorialists scurrying to explain the apparent presence of murderous intent in the youngest of perpetrators. Violence in the media is predictably among the first findings; the media is a big, slow-moving target, and self-critique can often pass for reformist concern, though no substantive changes in the quantity of media violence need follow. At the same time, it is difficult to ignore the fact that we as a society are fascinated by the shootings and the boys who have carried them out (all suspects to the time of writing have been male): we lap up interviews with their parents, teachers, and classmates; we look curiously at pictures of their schools and communities; we peer at their smiling yearbook pictures, seeking signs of the killer-to-be.

These impulses are what Karen Halttunen, a historian at the University of California at Davis, takes as her subject in *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination*. Beginning with the earliest American narratives of criminality—New England Puritans' execution sermons—Halttunen traces the history of the genre we now know as "true crime" during American society's shift from its primarily religious foundations in the eighteenth century to more secular, urban characteristics in the nineteenth. Halttunen argues that today's compulsive attempts to explain the crime of murder, whether through psychologizing the perpetrator or piecing together evidence and motive, are no more "natural" reactions to the crime

Amy L. Blair is a writer who lives in Boston.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than any other, but that they are our attempts to "comprehend radical human evil within the larger intellectual context of Enlightenment liberalism, which did not recognize radical human evil." If evil could not be human, it must be inhuman; the murderer must be radically alien, and the roots of his alienation need to be probed in order to prove everyone else's normalcy. This logic, Halttunen argues, has underwritten our society's treatment of so-called deviant criminals. Halttunen's thesis is fascinating, her archival research exhaustive, and her quotation from original sources lively and generous. The result is a persuasive history of American attitudes toward murder and, more generally, toward the nature of evil.

Halttunen's most significant contribution is her identification of an early American predecessor for today's true crime stories: execution sermons. These sermons were written to be delivered from the scaffold before the condemned's final punishment; they survive because they were subsequently printed and distributed as didactic tracts. Execution sermons paid little attention to motive or to the details of crimes. The sermon was another occasion to remind the general assembly of everyone's precarious perch on the edge of the abyss. The murderer was no different from anyone else in society, because he was simply another victim of the "innate and total depravity" that characterized all humanity after the Fall of Adam and the institution of Original Sin.

Early New England murderers also contributed to their narratives with exemplary (Halttunen suggests coached) confessions, emphasizing the minor transgressions that led to their crimes. "In the end," Halttunen writes, "the murderer's offense against society was recast into a service: the killer was to serve not just as an example of the vileness of sin, but as a dramatic public demonstration of the redemption of an exemplary sinner." Yet as the influence of church doctrine waned in the nineteenth century, the murderer's actions became more difficult to explain. If, as Enlightenment humanist thinkers were asserting, humans are innately disposed to virtue, and morality is not only socially desirable but personally pleasurable, how could one account for people who would turn from the virtuous to commit savage crimes, brutal torture, and sexual assault? "In replacing the declining cultural power of the sacred masterplot, the secular accounts tried to assign meaning to the crime of murder by treating each case as an extraordinary event, a particular episode demanding a unique explanation." But the multiplication of accounts, as Halttunen shows, only masks their essential sameness; though the spiritual masterplot has evaporated, new secular masterplots vie to replace it, sharing a common portrait of the criminal's absolute "otherness."

The bulk of *Murder Most Foul* is concerned with cataloging the criminal narratives offered by nineteenth-century true crime writers, and Halttunen demonstrates the relentless repetition of each trope by piling on the examples. Good intentions go awry, while the superabundance of evidence for each of her points reinforces, palpably, the obsessiveness of the genre; after a point her own writing becomes another instance of the undifferentiated, the uncritical. Murder narratives become the cultural barometers for sexual mores, for anxieties over urbanization and technological advances, for nearly every trendy topic of recent cultural studies. While Halttunen's contentions are for the most part solid, the occasional oversimplification cannot help but slip through. This unfortunately belittles Halttunen's stronger argument: that the representation of all criminals as mentally deficient deeply undermines attempts to rehabilitate or to treat all who are convicted of crimes.

Halttunen is exhaustive and focused in her reading of the forms of nineteenth-century murder narratives, but she falters when she turns to the question that underlies Sissela Bok's *Mayhem:* why do people seek out violent stories? Halttunen offers two approaches that arrive at the same (I believe intentionally) unsatisfying conclusion. Once criminality became equated with inhumanity, the primary purpose of murder narratives, particularly those that explored the traumatic childhoods or the phrenological abnormalities of criminals, was to convince the reader of his or her own humanity by demonstrating the criminal's radical otherness. But doesn't the need to keep affirming one's own humanity call it radically into question? If the murderer, the deviant, must be eliminated (through capital punishment) or at least quarantined (through incarceration), there must be some risk not only that others might be killed,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The 1998 Phi Beta Kappa Book Awards

The Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science

TAKING WING: ARCHAEOPTERYX AND THE EVOLUTION OF BIRD FLIGHT. *By Pat Shipman. Simon & Schuster. $25.*

Citation: This book is a rare delight, an engrossing and elegant treatment of how paleontologists think about the mechanics and evolution of flight. In *Taking Wing* Pat Shipman presents an extraordinarily broad synthesis of the biological literature on the development of flight, organized around the tale of Archaeopteryx, the blue-jay-sized proto-bird that lived some 150 million years ago. The question at the heart of the story is: Did these feathered, but also toothy-jawed and bony-tailed animals, first found in 1860 and declared by Thomas Huxley exquisite proof of Darwin's theory of evolution, actually fly? Her narrative breathes life into the seven known Archaeopteryx fossils and a single fossilized feather. From the very first sentence the reader is swept along on the flight.

The Christian Gauss Award

THE MIRROR OF JUSTICE: LITERARY REFLECTIONS OF LEGAL CRISES. *By Theodore Ziolkowski. Princeton University Press. $47.50.*

Citation: Taking justice as the perfect equilibrium of law and morality, Theodore Ziolkowski selects moments when this equilibrium has been, or has seemed to be, seriously disturbed, and shows how those disturbances translate into major literary texts. Discussions of the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, *Njal's Saga,* and various versions of the Reinhart Fuchs cycle; a brilliant central section on Sophocles' *Antigone* and its mirror image in *The Merchant of Venice;* and a powerful chapter on Kafka's *The Trial* are the highlights of a study that is scrupulous in its coverage of the major issues in legal history. This is a truly wonderful book, large in ambition, superbly clear in exposition, and wide enough in scope to have something for almost everyone.

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Award

THE NAME OF WAR: KING PHILIP'S WAR AND THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN IDENTITY. *By Jill Lepore. Knopf. $30.*

Citation: Jill Lepore offers a fresh assessment of an episode already much studied, King Philip's War, a conflict between Indians and English settlers in seventeenth century New England. In this study, she combines a keen awareness of critical methodologies with an unusual ability to tell an important story in a compelling way. The subject of the book might be said to be war, or cultural communication, or language and its social functions. Lepore makes frequent and effective use of postmodernist literary and cultural tools without lapsing into insularity or losing narrative momentum. *The Name of War* demonstrates breadth of knowledge and maturity of judgment; it is a book that deserves, and will doubtless gain, a broad audience.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but also that others might succumb to deviance. This is the ambiguity that drives the compulsive reiteration of true crime stories at the same time that it ensures their ultimate inadequacy, thus perpetuating the genre. Evil is mysterious in the American true crime narrative's Gothic imagination, and while it is continuously questioned, and sought, it can never be answered within the conventions of the Gothic: which is a complicated way of saying that we all crave mystery.

Halttunen attempts to explain this by returning to the Romantic notion of the Sublime—Kant's "negative pleasure," in which that which most disturbs us is also most pleasing—in describing a new "pornography of violence" that involves nineteenth-century readers in a cycle of escalating sensationalism. Pain itself, it seems, took on new dimensions of horror with the possibility of its alleviation through more skillful medicine and the discovery of powerful anesthetics and analgesics. Popular literature played a role as well, as sentimental fiction elevated the spectacle of suffering to an opportunity for the spectator to demonstrate his or her refinement through displays of weeping and fainting.

As pain became less acceptable in the world of Enlightenment humanist sensitivity, though, representations of gory murder details became more graphic and more prolific. Halttunen finds increasingly detailed descriptions of crime scenes, of the pain victims suffered, and of the horrors of the postmortem dissection room, all narrated with salaciously charged language. She observes that "though the initial impulse of the cult of horror was to establish an unsurpassable moral distance between the murderer and those who read of his crime, its ultimate tendency was to implicate the readers in the murderer's guilt. . . . Perhaps this is why the techniques of body-horror grew ever more revolting over time: bringing the viewer closer to the murderer's violence heightened the need to vilify the murder in an effort to reassert a reassuring moral distance from evil." And so the true crime author arrives at the same impasse as her Puritan predecessor, with the reader too closely identified with the murderer. While Puritan execution sermons could explain the similarities by citing innate sinfulness, secular writers had no recourse but to the mystery of evil. Again, mystery, and the endlessly fruitless quest for solution.

Sissela Bok's purpose in *Mayhem* is not that of the critic but of the applied philosopher: she wants to explore the possibilities for reducing the ill effects of entertainment violence, and in order to do so she must extricate herself from the entrancing cycle of violent representation and look from outside, not at the violence itself, but at its audience. Bok, like Halttunen, asserts from the outset that "there is . . . nothing new about the attraction of violence in its own right," beginning her genealogy with the Greeks' pleasure in Homeric battle scenes and with Roman gladiatorial events. Bok is not concerned with the content of "entertainment violence"; she describes debates over definitions as "one of the quickest ways to short-circuit serious reflection about any form of violence." As her language indicates, she is primarily concerned about the conspicuous place of entertainment violence. Violence is uniquely available, she argues, and is available in more intimate and unmediated settings than ever before.

Bok does not distinguish real from not-real violence, because once mediated by the screen, all violence has the same appearance of reality (and, by that measure, the same appearance of unreality). Add to this young children's incomplete notions of what separates the real from the not-real, and the effect, Bok asserts, is a generation "exposed . . . to amounts and levels of entertainment violence that are potentially more brutalizing than many adults—parents, script writers, and TV producers among them—realize." Compounding the problem is a group of adults, then, who are unable to understand the heightened effects of violent scenes on children, and who are themselves considerably desensitized by their own steady diets of entertainment violence. Bok's catalogue of effects is familiar and bleak: increased fear of victimization, with increased mistrust of others; desensitization to violence, including the reluctance to take action on the part of a victim of violence; and, finally, increased appetite for violent scenes or even for participation in violent activity.

There is much of merit in Bok's position and in the substantive political suggestions that follow. Indeed, policy advances often depend on temporary agreements to disagree over many important aspects of a problem. But Bok's pragmatism in the name of policy overlooks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

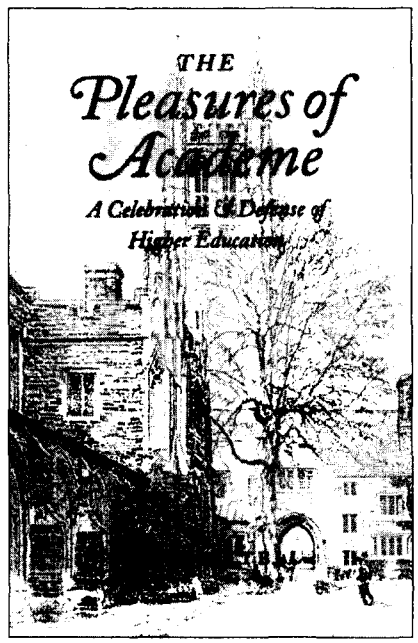
even the youngest child's capacity to contextualize the things she witnesses, and recognizing this capacity—the ability to comprehend even the most basic back-story in entertainment violence—may enable our policies to reflect the subtleties behind what Bok has already characterized as a historical taste for entertainment violence. To take one of the most-cited examples: children mimicking Mighty Morphin Power Rangers on the playground frequently injure themselves or others. Schools respond by banning Power Rangers paraphernalia from campus. Regardless of whether or not we agree with a school's right to take this action, it is important that we not forget that the Power Rangers, however media-savvy, however marketing-oriented, however tackily garbed or poorly scripted, offer a narrative of good (and young, talented good at that) defeating evil in the grand tradition of cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, Axis and Allies, and the generic good guys versus the bad guys. In playing such games, children have always injured other children. A more interesting approach might be to ask, as Halttunen did of her nineteenth-century middle-class crime readers, why this particular incarnation of Manichaean play arouses such anxiety in parents and educators.

Bok's greatest shortcoming in *Mayhem* is her tendency to resort (albeit with the best intentions) to rhetorical hyperbole. She doesn't just bracket the question of why people are attracted to violence; she dismisses it altogether by representing her subject audiences as enthralled and passive. Viewers have violence "beamed at them daily"; there are "worldwide distribution systems, piping programs into hundreds of millions of homes at all hours"; the programs "arouse" viewers to facilitate absorption of advertising messages. Halttunen's theoretical meticulousness is in this respect a welcome corrective to Bok. Halttunen rejects the notion of an enthralled spectator, or of an entirely naïve audience. Her readers involve themselves in the narratives through identification with either the criminals or the detectives. Bok's call for schools to offer training in critical media skills, by contrast, assumes utter helplessness as the baseline situation of contemporary audiences. The siege mentality can go only so far; a more hopeful portrait of humanity would be one in which audiences engage with

The Pleasures of Academe
BY JAMES AXTELL

"A humanely sensitive, historically informed, and splendidly affirmative evocation of the challenges and (yes!) the *joys* of the academic calling."

FRANCIS OAKLEY,
PRESIDENT EMERITUS OF
WILLIAMS COLLEGE



"N"
publishers of Bison Books
800-755-1105 nebraskapress.unl.edu

UNIVERSITY OF
NEBRASKA PRESS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

texts, whether written or projected on a screen.

The problem for both Bok and Halttunen is to explain how we view murderers, and each presents a sweeping view (albeit a historically inflected one) of audience attitude. Yet the murderer is often neither a monster nor an innocent, but some combination of the two, and our recognition of this must be acknowledged. Nietzsche wrote that "the criminal is frequently not equal to his deed; he makes it small and slanders it." Perhaps this is why we are fascinated by the murderer, and why we seek out entertainment violence: because by being one of us, and yet acting utterly unlike one of us, the murderer is the only one who publishes his ambiguity. The unthinkable act makes him visibly the bundle of contradictions we all feel ourselves to be but cannot, for some reason, be. And so, with Halttunen and Bok, we watch, and read, and interpret, and condemn.

Austrian Nights

THE TALE OF THE 1002ND NIGHT
By Joseph Roth, translated by Michael Hoffman.
St. Martin's Press. $23.95.

Reviewed by SUSAN MIRON

A critic writing about Joseph Roth in the pages of the *Times Literary Supplement* described the elusive novelist as "one of the great literary oddities of his century. He took himself off the files so efficiently that most of us have only just heard of him. He should now be ruthlessly exposed." Yet sixty years after his death, Roth remains a fugitive from fame. One of this century's foremost writers in the German language and, as a journalist, one of the central figures in the émigré opposition to the Nazis, Roth is considered, among those familiar with his work, as one of the greatest writers of fiction to have emerged from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His novels memorably evoke both the vanished world of Jewish culture in Central Europe and the glories of the Habsburg monarchy.

Roth's few yet fervent supporters insist that his "splendid wholeness" makes reading him in his entirety both a necessity and a delight, so when the galleys of his mordant novel *The Tale of the 1002nd Night* arrived, I succumbed to my second Joseph Roth binge, rereading his lengthy shelf of novels and novellas, including *Right and Left* and *The Legend of the Holy Drinker, The Spider's Web* and *Zipper and His Father, Tarabas, Weights and Measures, Confessions of a Murderer, Hotel Savoy, The Silent Prophet, Job, The Emperor's Tomb,* and of course his most famous novel, *Radetzky March.*

Curious about the man with the haunted face and hypnotic stare featured on the dust jackets of his works, and frustrated by the dearth of information on Roth in English, I endeavored to make my way through works by or about him in German, including the superb biography of Roth by David Bronsen, a memoir of Roth by his colleague Soma Morgenstern, and the charming illustrated volume *Briefe aus Deutschland,* a collection of Roth's columns written under the pseudonym "Cuneus" for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1927–28. The prolific reporter also contributed pieces to Viennese left-wing newspapers, writing as "der rote Roth" (the Red Roth).

Although respected as a journalist for his prescient, candid observations, Roth was far less truthful about his own life, around which he embroidered a romantic mythology. He insisted that his birthplace was Schwaby/Schwabendorf, whose impoverished inhabitants, he wrote, "lived by miracles." His father, he claimed, was a gentile Austrian army officer with whom his mother had an illicit romance. In fact Roth was born—legitimately—in 1894 to Jewish parents in Brody, in Galicia, on the outermost reaches of the Habsburg Empire, close to the Russian border, which serves as the setting for several of his stories. Roth's father apparently went mad and vanished, abandoning his family before Joseph's birth. Named for his maternal grandfather, Roth signed his name as Moses Joseph Roth until he was nineteen. He served for a year or two with the Austro-Hungarian army on the eastern front during World War I, but—contrary

Susan Miron, a harpist and writer, is a frequent commentator on Eastern European fiction and social history.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to his more heroic claims—it seems that he was assigned to the information service, most likely as a journalist.

Six weeks after completing *Radetzky March* in 1932, Roth wrote in a letter: "My strongest experience was the war and the death of the Fatherland, the thing that has most obsessed me. Today I am a thoroughly patriotic Austrian who cherishes the remains of my country as a kind of relic." An inveterate hotel dweller, and a famously public drinker who would sit in cafés downing Pernod, cognac, beer, and wine, Roth rationalized his drinking by arguing that "it keeps me more honorable and genuine as it ruins me, slowing down my immediate death." Roth endured few dry spells as either a writer or a tippler. "I write each day," he explained, "only in order to lose myself in invented fates. I work to numb myself, to flee."

During his six years as a Parisian exile (beginning in 1933), Roth came to describe himself as a monarchist, a reactionary "close to becoming an orthodox, perhaps even a militant Catholic," though he never actually converted. When not stricken with bouts of Jewish self-hate, Roth vacillated between boasting of his "low" Eastern European Jewish origins and categorically denying his Jewish identity, as when he insisted in a letter to his idol, the Austrian novelist Stefan Zweig: "As a soldier and officer I was not a Jew. As a German writer I am not a Jew either." The profound contradictions and conflicts in his character followed him to the end: his funeral in Paris was attended by a rabbinical scholar, a rabbi, a Catholic priest, and a deputy of the Habsburg royalist party.

Fathers, like vanished fatherlands, play an inordinately large role in Roth's fiction, including *The Tale of the 1002nd Night*, the last of his works to be translated into English. Most of Roth's fiction establishes his characters' patrimony and the implied stability of their fathers' world within the first page, which makes the sagas of their sons' alienation, homelessness, and obsolescence all the more wrenching. If Robert Musil created a man without qualities, Roth's usual hero—like so many of his characters—is a man without a homeland, without a stable family, suspended in a society he cannot fathom. Many of his heroes, especially in his early novels, are discharged soldiers adrift in a disorienting world. Puppets at the mercy of

Princeton

The View from the Tower

Origins of an Antimodernist Image

Theodore Ziolkowski

Immediately after World War I, four major European and American poets and thinkers—W. B. Yeats, Robinson Jeffers, R. M. Rilke, and C. G. Jung—moved into towers as their principal habitations. Taking this striking coincidence as its starting point, this book sets out to locate modern turriphilia in its cultural context and to explore the biographical circumstances that motivated the four writers to choose their unusual retreats.

This is a delightful book, written with general readers in mind.

Cloth $29.95 ISBN 0-691-05907-1

W. H. Auden

A Commentary

John Fuller

"A deeply impressive and valuable achievement that has no real equal in the critical literature on any modern poet. It explains thousands of allusions in all of Auden's plays and poems—and covers virtually all of Auden's published work. . . . Fuller makes the poems he writes about more enjoyable to read, not merely more comprehensible."
—Edward Mendelson, Editor of *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden*

Cloth $35.00 ISBN 0-691-00419-6

Princeton University Press

AT FINE BOOKSTORES OR CALL 800-777-4726
HTTP://PUP.PRINCETON.EDU

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

capricious twists of fate, Roth's characters rarely emerge unscathed by loneliness, disillusionment about the present, or anxiety about the future (several works end just on the cusp of new wars). Yet as if to counterbalance this overwhelming nihilism, Roth characteristically allows most of his protagonists a shot at some nearly magical redemption, which he calls in book after book "a new life."

Roth frequently seems to be shrugging his shoulders at the chronic instability of his fictional world by alluding to fate, a word that, like *alone* and *vanish,* appears with alarming persistence throughout his fiction and correspondence. There is, for instance, this passage in a 1936 letter to Zweig, in which he complains that "Fate presses upon me in a terrible, too cheaply symbolic way as if it wants to imitate a stupid novelist." *Flight Without End,* a novel that Roth suggested was a kind of fictional autobiography, describes the narrator's "friend, comrade, and spiritual associate" Franz Tunda as a man alienated from society, disillusioned with the revolutionary left, living the life of a perpetual vagabond who was "always at the mercy of fate" and who, like Roth and most of his other fictional stand-ins, felt like "a stranger in this world." Along with many of his melancholy characters, Roth was at home neither in his time ("an age which has no use for us," as a character in *Radetzky March* puts it) nor in his various places of exile.

The chiaroscuro veneer of *The Tale of the 1002nd Night,* wonderfully rendered in Michael Hoffman's excellent translation, resembles Roth's beautiful last novella, *The Legend of the Holy Drinker.* A paean to the Austrian capital Roth had loved but had been compelled by the rise of the Nazis to flee, *The Tale of the 1002nd Night* begins and ends with incidents involving the fairy-tale-like visit of a Persian shah to Vienna, at a time when the world was "deeply, frivolously, contentedly at peace." The restless shah has traveled to Austria with his chief eunuch "in the spring of the year 18—" to pay a state visit to His Royal and Imperial Apostolic Majesty, the Emperor. Lavishly feted, the imperious shah unexpectedly demands the sexual services of a noblewoman he has met at a ball. The shameless Baron Tiettinger (who appears as well in *Radetzky March*) tries to salvage the situation by procuring a look-alike for the shah's pleasure. The surrogate is the baron's former mistress, Mizzi Schinagel, with whom he has had an illegitimate son that both despise.

While working in Frau Josephine Matzner's bordello, Mizzi, "numbed by the speed of fate," plays hostess to the shah. She is rewarded with a string of pearls that acts like a Wagnerian curse, destabilizing if not ruining the lives of most of the characters who come into contact with it. In Roth's fiction, money or gifts inevitably transform his characters' destinies, but like other props in Roth's world, money and good luck quickly and alarmingly vanish. In the course of the novel the pearls change hands several times, becoming more valuable with each transaction, while the hapless Mizzi; the narcissistic, emotionally vacuous Tiettinger; Xandel, their wretched and wretchedly treated son (who means less to Mizzi "than any child she could think of"); and the rapacious Frau Matzner are thrust into a Jonah-like tale of descent, fraught with death wishes, drinking, and disgrace.

One of Roth's achievements in the novel is his panoramic portrayal of Viennese society. There are few good guys here, and certainly no heroes. In the novel's last paragraph, the waxwork artist Tino Percoli philosophizes for his demoralized creator, then drinking himself to death as the Nazis were closing in: "I might be capable of making figures that have heart, conscience, passion, emotion, and decency. But there's no call for that at all in the world. All the world wants are curiosities; it wants monsters, really. Monsters are what they want!"

The last of Roth's novels to be published in Europe (in 1939), this melancholy eulogy to Vienna suffered exasperating publishing delays, though this was the least of Roth's troubles at the time. His Dutch publishers, De Gemeenschap, audaciously complained to him about the disappearance of his market, Austria and Czechoslovakia; yet this hardly mattered because the entire stock of the book was destroyed in 1940 following the invasion of the Netherlands by the Germans. That so much of his work is again in print in so many languages would doubtless delight this often-despairing writer whose fiction conveyed not only profound misery and loss, but also the quixotic hope of redemption—as he so often put it, "a new life."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Angry and Disappointed

THE DEATH OF ADAM:
ESSAYS ON MODERN THOUGHT
By Marilynne Robinson. Houghton Mifflin. $23.

Reviewed by TESS LEWIS

The beauty of Marilynne Robinson's enchanting novel *Housekeeping* lies precisely in the explanations that surround and often overshadow its slender collection of facts. The narrator, Ruthie, recounts her childhood in the small Montana town of Fingerbone on the shore of a glacial lake. Yet it is not the particulars of her upbringing under the dubious care of her grandmother, then two maiden great-aunts, and finally her mother's eccentric younger sister, that haunt the reader, but the numinous mysteries of a child's world and the competing claims of family loyalty and the drive to better oneself.

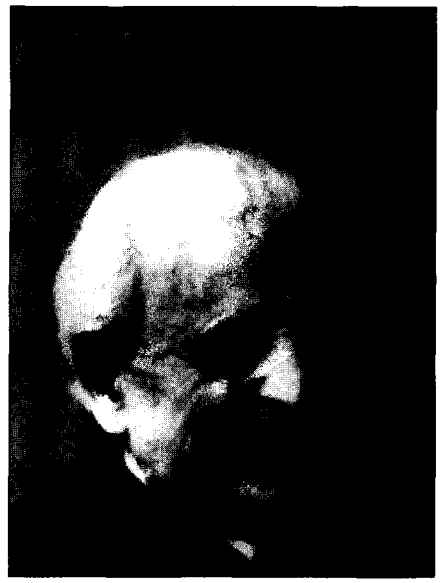
In the eighteen years that lie between that novel and this new collection of her somber, often angry essays, Robinson seems to have pursued facts with a vengeance. In 1989 she published *Mother Country: Britain, the Welfare State, and Nuclear Pollution,* a book-length essay in which she exposed the extent to which the Sellafield nuclear waste processing plant in Britain's Lake District had contaminated the environment. In Britain, the Official Secrets Act makes it a crime for anyone to reveal information gathered in the course of work as a public employee without proper authorization. Even so, Robinson marshaled considerable evidence from newspaper accounts and scientific studies to support her charges and fuel her indignation. How, she asked, can a country so committed to social welfare behave so self-destructively? She went on to search the literature of reform, from Daniel Defoe to Karl Marx, Jeremy Bentham, and Beatrice Webb, for some explanation of this egregious case of cultural cognitive dissonance.

The appalling discoveries she made while

Tess Lewis's translation of Peter Handke's *Once Again for Thucydides* was recently published by New Directions Press.

EMMANUEL LEVINAS

"A superb introduction to his work. . . .



. . .This collection of essays on religion, politics, and the primary of ethics. . . . Allows us to see the scope and significance of one of the defining thinkers of our time." —Arnold I. Davidson, The University of Chicago

The apotheosis of Levinas's philosophy, this volume includes his final reflections upon *suffering, love, religion, culture, justice,* human rights, and legal theory.

Entre Nous
Essays on Thinking-of-the-Other
Emmanuel Levinas
Translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav

256 pages • $35.00 cloth
European Perspectives:
A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism
Lawrence D. Kritzman, Editor

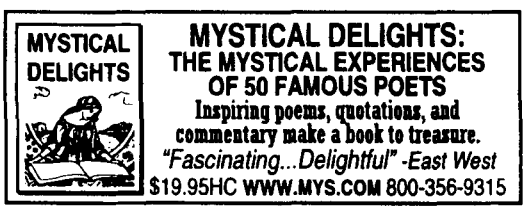
Columbia University Press
columbia.edu/cu/cup • 800 944 8648

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

researching *Mother Country* permanently altered Robinson's views. That book, as she has acknowledged, was "written in a state of mind and spirit I could not have imagined before Sellafield presented itself to me, so grossly anomalous that I had to jettison almost every assumption I had before I could begin to make sense of it. My writing has perhaps taken too much of the stain of my anger and disappointment."

This tone of anger and disappointment pervades her subsequent essays as well, many of them collected in *The Death of Adam.* In these essays, whose subjects include John Calvin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Charles Darwin, the Eighth Psalm, and American abolitionists, Robinson deems modern thought a failure. The real trouble, she suggests, began as cultural-religious beliefs were supplanted by scientific myths, especially those of "Malthus/Darwin/Nietzsche/Freud." Neither the original nor the contemporary advocates of this strain of thought leave room for the soul, preferring to replace the "old Adam, that near angel whose name means Earth" with "a creature who shares essential attributes with whatever beast has been recently observed behaving shabbily in the state of nature." Robinson is eager to rehabilitate the "old lost myth" of civilization as a source of enrichment and enlightenment and humanism, "that old romance of the self" espousing the idea that the self is capable of improvement through complexity, beauty, and difficulty.

The kind of complexity, beauty, and difficulty she has in mind is well represented by John Calvin's writing. According to Robinson, careful study of his erudition, discernment, and intelligence could go a long way toward improving—if not rescuing—contemporary souls. But of course he must be read properly. Robinson finds that few scholars in theology or in intellectual or religious history actually bother to read him, relying instead on the willful misinterpretations of influential but deeply partisan scholars such as Lord Acton. Many fail to consider Calvin at all.



In the lengthy introduction and the two essays that form the core of the book, Robinson meticulously deconstructs the stereotypical negative image of Calvin as an illiberal thinker who actively condoned the repression and persecution of heretics. She is careful to acknowledge his flaws and weaknesses, yet convincingly demonstrates that Calvin is regarded by many scholars and intellectuals with "ill-informed condescension." Were these writers to set aside their biases and read Calvin's work, they might be forced to come to terms with his considerable accomplishments.

In counterpoint to Calvin, Robinson presents Charles Darwin. Although she finds, again, that scholars in all fields prefer predigested versions of Darwin's theories of evolution and natural selection to careful study of his primary texts, Darwinism is not rejected out of hand, like Calvinism, but rather has been raised to the level of an almost unassailable truth. Robinson finds it used as justification and rationalization for selfishness and greed in economics as well as in sociology. The constraints of conscience, charity, and religion have been replaced by self-interest and the survival of the fittest.

Robinson is certainly compelling, and her diagnosis of society's ills is convincing. Yet her arguments are marred by a tone of rhetorical coyness and some unnecessary tub thumping. An example of the latter occurs when she offers Thomas Jefferson as a corollary to Calvin. She restates the canard that many Americans believe Jefferson "wrote the Declaration of Independence unconscious of the irony of the existence of slavery in his land of equality." The fact that Jefferson was not only fully aware of the irony, but also agonized over it, surely has common currency as well.

Robinson's coyness is even more irritating than such overstatements. Amidst pages of forceful argument and even tiresome repetition, she suddenly seems concerned with social niceties. "I would never suggest so rude an experiment as calculating the percentage of one's relatives one would actually choose as friends, the percentage of one's relatives who would choose one as *their* friend," she demurs in an otherwise straightforward discussion of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kinship. (A realistic experiment, perhaps, but hardly rude—unless one were to inform those relatives who failed the friendship test.) In another essay, she notes that "I am speaking, as I know it is rude to do, of the Social Darwinists, the eugenicists, the Imperialists, the Scientific Socialists who showed such firmness in reshaping civilization in Eastern Europe, China, Cambodia and elsewhere, and, yes, of the Nazis." Again, her readers will certainly be able to differentiate between serious subjects and lapses in *bon ton*. Unfortunately she fails to recognize a real lapse. In "Marguerite de Navarre," her first long essay on John Calvin, Robinson admits that the title she has given the essay is "somewhat misleading," observing, "If I had been forthright about my subject, I doubt that the average reader would have read this far." The average (or above-average) reader would certainly be justified in putting the book down right there. It's a pity that, as with relatives, one can't choose one's readers.

There are essays in *The Death of Adam* that work effectively, such as "Psalm Eight," in which Robinson discusses her experience of growing up Presbyterian through her encounter with the Eighth Psalm. And she offers a number of interesting insights throughout the book. In "Family," for instance, Robinson observes that the unquestioned loyalty that once kept families together under almost any circumstances has been eroded. Not only have we "reasoned our way to uniformly conditional relationships," she explains, but we have further doomed the family by developing "a historical version of the victim defense, visiting our sins upon our fathers."

For all her careful research, earnestness, and well-founded indignation, Robinson's anger and disappointment pervade this book as well. Readers drawn to *The Death of Adam* by the lightness of touch and wry humor of *Housekeeping* are also in for disappointment. The issues Robinson discusses are indeed vital to the commonwealth. Yet these essays suffer from her inability to maintain a critical distance from her subjects. There is more than a touch of the Ancient Mariner here.

INCHARDI

Recent novels by J. Inchardi, $20.00 each

I REACH OVER NOW

A New Year's Eve party in Paris. The long walk home afterwards. Voices from afar. Voices from within. (A cryptic tree in Peru.) Adventures. A peculiar affair on a Parisian bridge at sunrise. (1994, 255 pages.)

MORNING IN SNUG HARBOR

Early morning at the old sailors' home, North Carolina. Five seamen drink coffee, ninety-five seamen sleep. Nautical dreams: women of the port. Stories are told as a story unfolds. (1996, 268 pages.)

A ROSE COLORED BOAT

An autobiographical novel; fact and fantasy. Portrait of the artist as young fool/old fool. A wonder-rabbi's funeral. A manual for poets. The reader makes a sea voyage by night with ghosts. (1998, 266 pages.)

US

2500 A.D.: a Pacific coast village outside the ruins of Los Angeles. A one-gender nation. Factory reproduction, sexual excesses. Reflections on the wisdom of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. Comments from the 30th. (1999, 150 pages.)

Order by mail from **Sirius Books**, P.O. Box 177, Freeport, Maine 04032

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Vidiasyncrasies

BEYOND BELIEF:
ISLAMIC EXCURSIONS AMONG THE
CONVERTED PEOPLES
By V. S. Naipaul. Random House. $27.95.

SIR VIDIA'S SHADOW:
A FRIENDSHIP ACROSS FIVE CONTINENTS
By Paul Theroux. Houghton Mifflin. $23.95.

Reviewed by JEFFREY MEYERS

In his 1939 essay "Marrakech," George Orwell wrote that to Western eyes "people with brown skins are next door to invisible." Defining the theme of his books in a letter to me in October 1992, the brown-skinned writer V. S. Naipaul wrote that *India: A Million Mutinies Now,* his third book on his ancestral homeland, "is about people caught at a cultural hinge moment: a whole civilization is on the turn. . . . It seeks to make that change clear, and to make a story of it. This is also true of my Mohammedan book, *Among the Believers* [1981]. . . . It is about cultural upheaval, a hinge moment in once remote civilizations." Naipaul's race and background have given him a profound understanding of his subject. In his fiction and travel books he has made these people visible—just as Orwell longed to do.

In *Beyond Belief* (which could use a few maps), Naipaul returns, seventeen years after the publication of *Among the Believers,* to catch up on the latest horrors in Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia. He records representative stories of some Muslims and tries to bring them alive for Western readers. But his argument is radically flawed. In the prologue he states that "everyone not an Arab who is a Muslim is a convert. . . . His holy places are in Arab lands; his sacred language is Arabic. . . . He rejects his own; he becomes, whether he likes it or not, a part of the Arab story." Naipaul expresses regret for "the overthrow of the old religions—religions linked to the earth and animals and the deities of a particular place or tribe—by the revealed religions." Like D. H. Lawrence in *The Plumed Serpent,* he'd like to replace revealed religion with the "dark gods."

But Naipaul ignores the fact that Arabs from Morocco to Iraq were also converted by the fierce tribesmen who in the seventh century rode out of Arabia—two holy cities surrounded by a desert; he also ignores the fact that some of these countries have been Muslim for more than a thousand years, have their own sacred places (Karbala in Iraq, Qom in Iran), and cannot at this point possibly feel the loss of old pagan deities. Naipaul's argument is like saying that all Christians around the world—except the direct descendants of Aramaic-speaking followers of Christ, living between Bethlehem and Galilee—feel cut off from their ancestral gods.

In his earlier, intensely "Vidiasyncratic" books, Naipaul responded personally and powerfully to the troubling events he described. His dark vision scourged Third World politicians and intellectuals, who greeted his works with cries of wounded outrage. The brutally honest anatomist of "backward societies" once said what no one else would dare to say. In a 1981 interview with *Newsweek* he explained the "parasitism and barbarism" of Islamic dictators by exclaiming: "Poor little wog, poor little cannibal, he hasn't had his fresh meat today." In *Beyond Belief* Naipaul prefers to hint at rather than state this theme by alluding early in the book to Othello's description of cannibals "whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders." Naipaul's fangs now seem worn away, his claws dull. "The writer," he tells us,

> is less present, less of an inquirer. He is in the background, trusting to instinct, a discoverer of people, a finder-out of stories. . . . The writer as traveler steadily retreats; the people of the country come to the front. . . . The writer has only to listen carefully and with a clear heart to what people say to him, and ask the next question, and the next.

This Olympian pose signals a similarly flawed technique. His passive retreat from the narrative, his surrender of his own distinctive voice to the commonplace tales of the man in the street (or mosque) doesn't work very well. His case histories—apart from those of a veteran of

Jeffrey Meyers has recently published biographies of Edmund Wilson, Robert Frost, Humphrey Bogart, and Gary Cooper.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the war between Iran and Iraq, and of the decadent Nawab of Bahawalpur—are like a social worker's report; his structure is weak; he dutifully, almost mechanically, plods through this stultifying and often repetitive material.

His long description of a story in an Indonesian women's magazine is deadly. Instead of vivid characters, we get a résumé: "She was also a research executive for CIDES, the Centre for Information and Development Studies (this was connected to ICMI, Imaduddin's and Habibie's Association of Muslim Intellectuals, and Adi Sasono was chairman of the board of directors)." His prose can also be pointlessly convoluted: "The man just across the main road was a government officer of the third grade: he was Linus' uncle through his step-grandmother (perhaps the second wife who had been indirectly responsible for the impoverishing of Linus' mother)."

The author of *Guerrillas* and *A Bend in the River* has done what I thought impossible: written a book as boring as its bland gray jacket. In fact, as Naipaul takes longer and longer to write each book, the books using this dead-end technique grow less and less impressive. *A Turn in the South* (1989), dull and imperceptive, marks the beginning of his decline; *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990) is the weakest of his three books on this subject; and *A Way in the World* (1994) is another tediously familiar return to his childhood in Trinidad. *Beyond Belief* has been greeted by most critics with respectful yawns.

Though Naipaul's "conversion" thesis is unconvincing, he persuasively extols the virtues of colonialism. He quotes a Pakistani who says that "the British were better than these governments," and he himself states that in Pakistan "the British-given courts . . . were still all that the country had. They met a need; that was why they had lasted." Though the West needs no persuading, his "clear heart" condemns the evils of Islam—"politics and sexual repression and cruelty and captive women and grime and lepers wasting away." Despite his apparent objectivity, his thumb is on the scale, and he describes, in a long series of gloomy words, the disastrous effects of the tyrannical Islamic governments. Starved, bombed, and massacred, the people suffer melancholy, betrayal, pain, grief, misery, tears, rage, desperation, fear, terror, cruelty, torture, and mutilation. Chaos is endemic, Naipaul explains, in a religion where

The Truth of Uncertainty

Beyond Ideology in Science and Literature

EDWARD L. GALLIGAN

"Mr. Galligan does not beat around the bush. . . . Literary theory is to him what history was to Henry Ford, namely bunk."
—STAIGE D. BLACKFORD

The Truth of Uncertainty celebrates values commonly associated with the past era of criticism, but it applies these values to contemporary works in a series of fresh and unusual inquiries.

208 pages, $29.95

University of Missouri Press
2910 LeMone Boulevard Columbia, MO 65201
http://www.system.missouri.edu/upress
1 800 828 1894

You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism

The first Christians effaced the historical Jesus, mythicizing him and doctoring his teachings through writing, selecting, editing, and finally canonizing a sacred literature; critical New Testament study confirms this. But now, maybe, the historical Jesus is recoverable by means of the *Thomas* document, unearthed in 1945, which claims to be enigmatic sayings of Jesus jotted down by a disciple journeying with Jesus. This claim is validated by Jack Hannah in **You Will Not Taste Death—Jesus and Epicureanism** through fitting the sayings chronologically with the historical framework of Mark's Gospel. Hannah then analyzes all 113 sayings: showing them to be free of early Christian contrivances, developing a new historical narrative, and demonstrating that in fact Jesus was oriented toward Epicureanism—the most materialistic, scientific, and antisuperstitious of all Hellenistic philosophies. The historical Jesus had a more realistic ontology and ethic than what his successors devised. Hannah's findings challenge the academic presupposition that Jesus taught within the theistic and messianic bounds of Judaism. This seminal, radical, 321pp. pbk. is $12 postpd. Order from:

Frank Publishing, 1816 Springmill Road
Mansfield, OH 44903-8907

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fanatical "martyrs" proclaim "the victory of blood over the sword" and where the entire tradition emanating from the Koran "gives the Muslim license to act violently."

This book is also, of course, about Naipaul's ambiguous, uncertain personality. He too has rejected his own country, people, and religion, and been "converted" to an alien culture. "I began to feel when I was quite young," he observes of Trinidad, "that there was an incompleteness, an emptiness, about the place, and that the real world existed somewhere else." Many of the stories he hears are half-familiar to him and summon up vivid pieces of his past. The last chapter concerns a father, like his own, who moved in and out of schizophrenia.

The background of this book, though deliberately left out, would have added greatly to its interest: whom he traveled with, how he made his contacts, what he did between interviews and writing up his notes, what it all cost (his expenses must have eaten up a large part of his advance). It would be fascinating to know how the notoriously arrogant, abrasive, and fastidious Naipaul could become a humble suppliant and submit to the discomfort—to the point of illness—of alien, even hostile places, where the faithful sometimes vowed to "crush India."

After completing this four-hundred-page onslaught against Islam, Naipaul quite suddenly married a Muslim and dedicated the book to her. Paul Theroux's memoir throws some interesting light on this event. Theroux's *Sir Vidia's Shadow: A Friendship Across Five Continents* is not about a great literary quarrel—like the controversies of Edmund Wilson and Vladimir Nabokov, Norman Mailer and Gore Vidal, Martin Amis and Julian Barnes—but about a thirty-year friendship that finally, for complex reasons, went bad. Long before its publication in America, zealously moralistic critics who had not read it called the book a "betrayal" that should not have been written. Though he criticizes Naipaul and reveals the darker side of his character in the last twenty pages of this long book, Theroux is, in fact, sympathetic, generous, and full of admiration for his mentor: "I felt lucky to know him, privileged to be with him, blessed for all his good advice, cautioned by his mistakes, stimulated by his intellect, enlightened by his work." Theroux has transformed his admiration, and his pain, into high art.

Theroux has previously paid tribute to his old friend in *V.S. Naipaul: An Introduction to His Work* (1972), the first and still the best book on the writer; in two essays in the collection *Sunrise with Seamonsters* (1985); and (when describing S. Prasad) in the novel *My Secret History* (1989). But this book—as I know from my own experience with Naipaul—provides the most thorough and deadly accurate account of his intriguing, elusive, and fascinating character. The two writers (Naipaul is nine years older) meet and travel together in Africa, which Naipaul hates and Theroux loves. Theroux brilliantly evokes the atmosphere of Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda in the 1960s, and portrays the exacting Naipaul awarding a third prize in an African literary contest because nothing is good enough for a first or a second prize.

Naipaul is strange, difficult, unlovable; contradictory, challenging, demanding; fussy, mocking, cruel; self-important, obsessive, and vindictive. He hates women and children, music and dogs. But he is also "brilliant, and passionate in his convictions, and to be with him, as a friend or fellow writer, I had always to be at my best." Naipaul is absurdly vain about his "beautiful physique." He claims he "tried to gas himself at Oxford, but failed because 'he ran out of coins to feed the gas meter,'" which recalls the supposed suicide attempt by Evelyn Waugh that failed when a swarm of jellyfish drove him out of the water. Naipaul constantly bemoans his own problems, but when Theroux confesses that his marriage has broken up, Naipaul refuses to discuss it.

At meals in restaurants (where Theroux always pays the bill), at dinner parties in London and Wiltshire, and at a literary conference in Hay-on-Wye, Naipaul expresses his sense of exile, refuses to praise contemporary authors (but pays grudging respect to "Shakey, Jimmy Joyce and Tommy Mann"), boasts of never giving anyone a second chance, and is notorious for his outrageous behavior and shocking pronouncements: "I think unless one hears a little squeal of pain after one's done some writing, one has not really done much." As Saul Bellow observed, "After one look from him, I could skip Yom Kippur."

Theroux provides many insights about Naipaul's inner circle. His slavishly devoted first wife, Pat—whom Naipaul met at Oxford and married in 1954—is shy, sweet, modest, and polite. Naipaul stops sleeping with her, fre-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The pulse of the world from the heart of the nation.

Don't miss a thing. Subscribe to *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition.* And be privy to astute analysis of the policies, issues, debates and developments that make the world's pulse race.

You get the inside word. Straight talk from the political pundits. In-depth coverage of the powers that be in Congress, the White House and abroad. Brilliant observations of the day's most significant political events. A roundup of rare, resourceful commentary on the Administration's every move.

This special weekly edition of *The Post* is read widely with the same high regard as our daily paper. It's full of exclusive reports and expert opinion to help uncover the big-picture implications of today's agenda. It's written by individuals who are uniquely qualified to interpret Washington affairs with remarkable insight. Investigative reporters like Bob Woodward. Observers like Jim Hoagland and Robert Samuelson. Plus guest authorities in every field.

Week in and week out, *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition* keeps you abreast of our ever-swirling political scene. You get...

Capital Politics. Penetrating assessments of the government's most controversial matters from the Pulitzer Prize-winning dean of American political analysts, David Broder.

The Political Pulse. Puts your finger on the significance of shifts and surges in the parties, voters, ethics, elections, campaigns, referendum, committees, lobbies and policies of America.

The Global Pulse. Amazing stories and investigative reports from the diplomatic front. We identify and examine the ripple effects of events as far away as the Persian Gulf to Peru, the Soviet Union to South Africa.

The Economic Pulse. Book World. Commentary. Science Lab. Films. Editorials.

Indeed. The Washington Post National Weekly Edition *imparts a wealth of knowledge on politics, government, the economy, international affairs, business and industry. Go ahead. Read it for information. And use it to make decisions. Subscribe now and save 62% off the cover price.*

Complete and return the coupon today.

NATIONAL WEEKLY EDITION

The Washington Post

Subscription Savings Form

☐ Yes! Start my one-year subscription (52 issues) to ***The Washington Post National Weekly Edition*** for only $39.00. That's a savings of $9.00 off the basic subscription rate and $62.40 off the newsstand price.

☐ Payment Enclosed
☐ Bill me later.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

Complete & mail to:
The Washington Post National Weekly
P.O. Box 37167
Boone, IA 50037

Allow 4-6 weeks for first issue to arrive.

Satisfaction Guaranteed or your money back on all unmailed issues

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quents prostitutes, takes an Anglo-Argentinian mistress called Margaret, often reduces Pat to tears, and frequently plays "the wayward demanding child to this wounded mother." He's also severe on his younger brother, Shiva. Raised in Trinidad by a horde of adoring women, Shiva is fat, drunken, unhappy, and angry. Forced into hopeless competition as a writer, he becomes a "suffering parody" of Vidia, who is intolerant, even cruel about his faults.

While Pat is dying of cancer in England, and Naipaul is traveling with Margaret and interviewing Muslims for *Beyond Belief,* he meets Nadira Alvi at a party in Pakistan. Though she has to be told who he is, Nadira (in an act that recalls Sylvia Plath's first meeting with Ted Hughes) boldly approaches Naipaul and kisses him on the mouth. The patient mistress, who has waited twenty-five years to marry Naipaul and in the process has become a kind of second wife, is suddenly dumped. When Naipaul marries Nadira in April 1996, two months after Pat dies, Margaret is devastated.

A year later Theroux discovers that the Naipauls have been selling off inscribed copies of his books. When he writes for an explanation, he receives an abusive response from Nadira. Jealous of the writers' friendship, she has "decided to take charge, to clean house in all senses." Reluctant to accept the truth, Theroux wonders if Naipaul is aware of what's happening. But Naipaul is so calculating and manipulative that he must have known, I think, what she was doing. The two old friends meet by chance on a London street, just as Theroux is discussing the matter with his son. Theroux appeals to Naipaul and asks, "Do we have something to discuss?" Naipaul, with "raptor's beak and cheated eyes," coldly responds: "Take it on the chin and move on." The disciple, at the height of his powers and threatening to surpass the master, has—like Margaret—served his purpose and must be discarded.

Earlier in the book Theroux observes that Naipaul "was not in any sense English, not even Anglicized, but Indian to his core." Despite all his achievements, as an Indian from the West Indies he has never ceased to feel defensive, insecure, under siege. Theroux's account, I believe, explains how Naipaul constructed a harsh and invulnerable persona to counter his own sense of inferiority and, by running down the opposition, to stake his claim to literary greatness.

Theroux has written a riveting story of two writers' lives: how they wrote books and won prizes, advanced their careers and achieved fame. He describes their acute sensitivity to criticism, their financial struggles, illnesses and mental problems, difficult marriages and love affairs. *Sir Vidia's Shadow*—as much about Theroux's own life and work as about his mentor's—is equal to his very best books, *Saint Jack* and *The Great Railway Bazaar.*

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION
(Act of August 12, 1970; Section 3685, Title 99, United States Code)

1. Title, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR; 2. Date of Filing, December 1998; 3. Frequency, Quarterly—January, April, July, October.; 4. Office of Publication, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Fourth Fl., Washington, D.C. 20036.

6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor: Publisher, Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Fourth Fl., Washington, D.C. 20036; Editor, Anne Fadiman, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Fourth Fl., Washington, D.C. 20036.

7. Owner: Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Fourth Fl., Washington, D.C. 20036; No Stockholders.

8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None.

9. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes have not changed during preceding 12 months.

10. Extent and nature of circulation	Average No. Copies Each issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
A. Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run)	30,914	29,886
B. Paid Circulation		
1. Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales	2,247	4,202
2. Mail Subscriptions	24,298	23,184
C. Total Paid Circulation	26,545	27,386
D. Free Distribution by Mail Carrier or Other Means Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies	1,313	1,330
E. Total Distribution (Sum of C and D)	27,858	28,716
F. Copies Not Distributed		
1. Office Use, Left-Over, Spoiled	520	872
2. Returns from News Agent	2,536	298
G. Total (Sum of E&F—should equal net press run shown in A)	30,914	29,886
H. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation	95%	95%

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.
Douglas W. Foard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE READER REPLIES

THE AUTUMN ISSUE

The articles in the Autumn 1998 issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR contained a fire hose of intellectually stimulating ideas, and the poems were filled with accessible thought. (Alas, I live in the kind of neighborhood that John Updike describes in his poem "Slum Lords.")

Although I had substantial criticisms of the previous two issues, I hereby retract them and substitute one word: Bravo!

HENRY EXALL, JR.
Dallas, Texas

I SCREAM, YOU SCREAM

I write this immediately after reading Philonoë's appetizing column on ice cream. What a cruel trick to play on one who has no ice cream readily available! But as soon as I finish this letter, I shall go to the grocery two blocks away, where there is a good supply of Breyer's. (I prefer the three-flavor carton.)

Having grown up in a small town in western Nebraska, with memories of large family picnics by a riverside at which one uncle was always in charge of the ice cream (six quarts, hand-cranked), I recognized a true lover of this ambrosia. How many memories Philonoë evoked! When I showed the essay to my wife, she walked directly to a shelf in the kitchen and took down a large loose-leaf notebook filled with a fifty-year collection of ice cream recipes, some clipped from newspapers and magazines, some hand-written (fortunately all legibly). I have a wonderful, nearly new, electric White Mountain freezer fit for a long bout of freezings, which will now be set to work. Even though it will soon be winter in Nebraska, I agree that there is always an open season on ice cream.

One may talk about Breyer's, Häagen-Dazs, and the rest, but not one can match the delight of proper homemade ice cream. My wife reminds me that we stopped making it after I had a multiple coronary bypass and that I am not supposed to eat such stuff. But there are worse ways of dying than by a heart attack or surgery. It would be terrible to be hit by a car or a falling brick, not having had one's ice cream first.

Another of my uncles, Harold Bosley, was a celebrated Methodist preacher, but between his sermons, he reverted to the small boy who was hiding quite close to the surface. Once he sent us this recipe, which Philonoë might like to add to her collection:

Three cans Eagle Brand sweetened condensed milk
Two quarts half-and-half
Four tablespoons vanilla extract
One tablespoon almond extract
One 15-oz. jar Carnation malt
Two bars German chocolate

Combine ingredients, add to freezer can; add whole milk if necessary to fill can to proper level. FREEZE PROPERLY, THEN EAT.

Bless Philonoë for her essay. Now I am off to the grocery.

WARREN BOSLEY, M.D.
Grand Island, Nebraska

Will someone please find Aristides? Philonoë's latest effort is an abomination. I mean, really, who cares about any of this drivel? If Philonoë intends to continue in this vein, perhaps her section should be retitled. How about "At Large and At Small and Of No Significance At All"? Better yet, why not show Philonoë the door?

M. QUILL
Storrs, Connecticut

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the late forties, Uncle Val churned his old ice cream mixer at Grandpa Witcher's surprise seventy-fifth-birthday party. We were at Grandpa's home in Huntingburg, Indiana, and all my aunts, uncles, and cousins were there. Uncle Val's ice cream was always the best, but this time it was the best of the best: vanilla, but with creamy character. It would coat the inside of my mouth with a gorgeous blonde flavor. Driving home to Louisville that evening, my mother gasped when I told her that I'd eaten six *big* cones. At this reaction, I figured it better not to mention the like number of RC Colas that had helped digest the ice cream. Nothing that good could ever make me sick.

More recently my health situation prohibited these delights, until surgery and chemotherapy treatments lost me twenty-five pounds. What better way to regain it than with vanilla milk shakes and homemade Peanut Butter Chip? I've found twenty of the lost pounds.

RICHARD W. MORGEN
Simpsonville, Kentucky

I thoroughly enjoyed Philonoë's paean to ice cream—though I confess to having been converted to frozen yogurt by the synergetic importunities of a slightly elevated cholesterol reading and the desire to have time enough after other commitments are fulfilled to write. (And, I suppose, if the horrid truth be told, to cavil at as many grammatical and syntactical infelicities as possible before I turn in my red pen.)

The mention of which instrument of correction brings me at last to the occasion for this note: Philonoë defines *Chondrus crispus* as "*a* cartilaginous red *algae*" (my italics). Unfortunately, since *algae* is the plural of *alga* (Latin for *seaweed*), the result is analogous to "this trees," or the all-too-common "this data" and "a criteria."

I *do* hate to fuss at someone whose writing has afforded me so much edification and entertainment—the twin criteria of excellence enunciated by Chaucer's Harry Bailey—but fair is fair. As a fellow guardian of both the beauty and power of the language, Philonoë will, I trust, forgive my linguistic nitpicking as easily as my dietary apostasy.

THOMAS W. HALL, JR.
Foster, Rhode Island

THE SPOKEN WORD

Carlyle's kind words to Emerson about Henry James's stammer, quoted in "Commonplace Book," should perhaps be qualified by the note that in 1843 the infant had only recently been born. But perhaps any fool would realize that Carlyle is alluding to Henry James, Sr., or that the date is wrong.

WARREN KEITH WRIGHT
Arbyrd, Missouri

André Bernard replies: Any fool might notice that, but *this* fool forgot to distinguish Henry James, Sr., from his son. (Henry James, Jr.,'s circumlocutions may well have caused stammers among his listeners, though; see Edith Wharton's description of her friend trying to elicit directions from a passerby when they had lost their way near Windsor Castle one evening.)

THE IMPIOUS IMPATIENCE OF JOB

Cynthia Ozick's elegant reading of Job enriched my philosophy like a jeweled garment over my wrinkled nakedness.

My second brush with death, after a first heart attack twenty years earlier, occurred three months ago. After an emergency-room examination, my surgeon queried me about what I expected to do with my life, since I was approaching my ninetieth birthday. I told him I planned to write more sonnets, my favorite avocation. It is now two heart bypasses later, and I am back at my law office.

My recent experience confirmed my view of the human adventure as well as of what happened to Job. I believe that life is a series of sensations trapped in my mind, where thought, as transient as the slightest puff of air, yet endures so that I can recall with delight an event that occurred when I was three. I am able to make decisions—exercise choice—when feelings summon up my ability to reason. When I read Cynthia Ozick's superb description of Job, it struck me that the author of that Book was saying what I had eked out: life is a tension between feeling and reason. Job's three visitors possessed the compelling gift of reason, but Job clung to his feelings about God. Feelings triumphed in the end, and the reader is cautioned not to rely upon reason alone.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My thanks to Cynthia Ozick, who made the Job story come alive, and dressed my jejune philosophy in white tie and tails.

ALFRED W. ISRAELSTAM
Highland Park, Illinois

Cynthia Ozick appears to approve of what she calls Job's "lightning insight" that "the ways of the true God cannot be penetrated." In other words, God's creatures are in no position to judge God morally. The trouble with this "insight," as John Stuart Mill and Dostoyevsky each pointed out in different ways, is that this view implies that we are in no position to judge God as morally good, or indeed in any other way. And if we are in no position to judge God as good, then although we may fear Him as an all-powerful tyrant, we are not justified in worshiping Him as an all-good Deity. Job's "lightning insight," as ascribed to him by Ms. Ozick, is, in other words, quite blasphemous.

KENNETH STERN
SUNY Albany, New York

MY GERMAN QUESTION

Surely someone as cosmopolitan as Peter Gay must realize that "his" "German question" is neither "his" nor a "German" question. Rather, it is "our" "Ugandan/Rwandan/Cambodian/Stalinist/Native American . . . " question. As such, it will not end with Mr. Gay's death, but will live on forever to haunt all of us who wonder how deep the wellsprings of hate run in the human soul and what magic it will take to quell them.

RALPH E. AVERY
Rockville, Maryland

The 1998
AMERICAN SCHOLAR AWARDS

We are pleased to announce
the first AMERICAN SCHOLAR Awards,
honoring the best writing that appeared in our pages
during the past year.

"Exiting Nirvana"
by CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK
Spring
Best Essay

"Orphans"
by PHILIP LEVINE
Summer
Best Poem

"Woman of Letters"
(*M. F. K. Fisher: A Life in Letters*)
by REBECCA PEPPER SINKLER
Spring
Best Review

"The Talmud and the Internet"
by JONATHAN ROSEN
Spring
Best Work by a Writer Under 35

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"ONLY CONNECT . . . "

I have subscribed to the SCHOLAR since 1968. I enjoyed Joseph Epstein's editorship, so I observed the transition to Anne Fadiman with cautious curiosity. I must say that if the most recent issues are any indication, I will certainly continue to subscribe.

The autumn issue arrived yesterday. "Only Connect . . . ," by William Cronon, was worth a thirty-year subscription.

WILLIAM CHRISTIE
Provost, Wingate University
Wingate, North Carolina

It was nice to read William Cronon's essay defining, rather than simply defending, liberal education, and I heartily agree with his conclusions. I wonder, though, whether he isn't simply listing personality traits that can't be taught, at least not by the time one gets to university. In any event, a couple of quibbles.

Medieval education was not so much for aristocrats to set themselves apart from peasants—there were plenty of other means to do that—but for ecclesiastics to set themselves apart from laymen. And "liberal arts," in Latin, is *artes liberales*, not *artis liberalis*. A liberal education should include enough Latin for one to distinguish between the nominative plural and the genitive singular!

JONATHAN GOOD
Minneapolis, Minnesota

William Cronon's bold claim that "liberal education . . . celebrates love" reminds me of an observation by Henry David Thoreau: "All that a man has to say or do that can possibly concern mankind, is in some shape or other the story of his love."

Does a liberal education also teach love? Cronon implies so. Certainly listening, talking, writing, and nurturing others—four of the ten qualities he lists—are or can be loving acts.

Is love needed in order for a liberal education to happen? Perhaps. Jane Addams once wrote that "intellectual life requires for its expansion . . . the influence of . . . the affection of others." She learned this as a young woman. By the time she was in her sixties, she had reached a broader conclusion. "We constantly think," she wrote, "that there are circumstances in which human beings can be treated without affection and there are no such circumstances."

LOUISE W. KNIGHT
Evanston, Illinois

William Cronon observes that a characteristic of liberally educated people is that they "read and understand." He astutely points out that there are many ways of reading, and that some of them can take place in museums, in concert halls, at athletic events, at theaters, in cinemas, by watching television, in forests and deserts, in farmers' fields, and on the World Wide Web. It is unfortunate, however, that he neglects to mention libraries as places where reading occurs, for it is in libraries that many people have their first experience of reading, and it is there that many continue to read throughout their lives. Libraries today collect and lend books, magazines, videos, compact discs, and CD-ROMs. They provide some people's only access to the World Wide Web. By maintaining a commitment to traditional ways of reading while at the same time embracing new technologies, a library connects people not only to the community of readers who are there at that moment, but also to a community of readers that extends backward into the past and forward into the future.

MARC MEOLA
Temple University Reference Librarian
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

I have recently entered academia from industry, having completed my Ph.D. in 1997. I find great irony in the fact that my university's business program incorporates many facets of liberal arts, while Mr. Cronon tells us that liberal arts programs are doing just the opposite.

MICHAEL CAMARATA
Marywood University
Scranton, Pennsylvania

FICTION AT *THE NEW YORKER*

I read Frances Kiernan's "Fiction at *The New Yorker*" with great interest, largely because, as she mentions in the piece, I was a colleague of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hers for many years in the magazine's fiction department. It would take too long to go into fine detail about how different from hers my view of that department is, but I don't want THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR's record to rest entirely on her account, so I'll simply say that along with the many wonderful stories published by *The New Yorker* from the years 1966 to 1986, there were dozens of pestilentially boring pieces, and sometimes the magazine would have been better advised, in my opinion, to print one story instead of the two or three that Fran so happily recalls. In comparison to the fiction of the late sixties and early seventies, I think the stories in *The New Yorker* improved significantly in 1976 and then again, and particularly, in 1986, when Robert Gottlieb became editor. Boundaries of "taste" were pushed back, the number of new contributors rose dramatically, and the departmental contention that Fran implicitly laments, while it was indeed often lamentable, also was often accompanied by a new liveliness and engagement among the editors.

No one reveres *The New Yorker* for its role in setting literary standards more than I do—William Maxwell being my idea of a perfect editor. And there's no question that fiction in *The New Yorker* does not enjoy the prominence it once did and might again. But the pronouncement of any age being a "golden" one always seems risky. I think we—and I include myself—project the saturated intensity of our own youth upon our external circumstances, if we're lucky enough not to have to endure real adversity. The Golden Age was always Before. Middle Age is always Bronze.

DANIEL MENAKER
Division Vice President
Senior Literary Editor
Random House
New York, New York

Frances Kiernan, contrary to what she wrote, is not guilty of *ex post facto* "fruitless tuttutting." She gave me a splendid and perhaps melancholy glimpse of a world I loved that was and is no more.

I have my own fond memories of a simple world with brighter colors and more lilting turns of phrase, of friendships well founded—and even those foundered—viewed dimly through the merciful glass of time.

Once upon a time there really was an abundance of worthy unsolicited manuscripts. That there is a shortage of good writing in the editor's in-box today may speak more to the times than to the practice of writing.

DAVID BLYTHE
Oxford, Mississippi

THE PRICE OF PRIVILEGE

It is encouraging to read in Evan Carton's essay on "Civil Disobedience" that students at the University of Texas are getting wise to Henry David Thoreau's undeserved self-aggrandizement. Perhaps these intelligent young people can end the pretense of living in imitation of Thoreau's fantasies—the style that overwhelmed the sixties.

Civil disobedience has usually been proclaimed by those who did not want to be bothered with the self-sacrifice required by obedience. I have come to the conclusion that Thoreau was simply a charlatan, even though he probably convinced himself of the superiority of the primitive, the ignorant, and the young. However, he lived on the charity of others, and his own back-to-nature living was largely pretense: amateur theorizing based on neither history nor science. Students are wise not to fall for one of the earliest do-it-yourself PR jobs.

JEAN HARMON
Silver Spring, Maryland

THE READER REPLIES (SUMMER)

I was happy to write Anne Fadiman at *Civilization* to say we'd miss her. I was happy to give THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR permission to print my letter. But boy, was I horrified to see it placed among letters about her arrival at the SCHOLAR and her predecessor's departure. In that context the letter looks as if I celebrate the loss of the eminently literate Joseph Epstein, which I sure don't.

ANNIE DILLARD
Key West, Florida

Please send letters to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, *1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Fourth Floor, Washington, D.C. 20036, or e-mail them to* scholar@pbk.org. *Letters may be edited for length and clarity.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Podium

Damned by Dollars

SARA PARETSKY

When Melville published *Moby-Dick* in 1851, the critics were hostile and the public bought only a handful of copies. This reception left Melville confused and poor. He worked hard at dead-end jobs to support himself and struggled at night to write. He produced poetry that no one wanted to read, and often destroyed in the morning work that he had labored on all night. Indeed, during the last twenty years of his life, most people in American letters thought he was dead. At one point he wrote to Hawthorne, one of his few supporters, "I am so pulled hither and thither by circumstances. The calm, the coolness, the silent grass-growing mood in which a man ought always to compose—that I fear, can seldom be mine. Dollars damn me."

Today, if anything, these dollar pressures are more extreme. Not only has the feeding frenzy of conglomeration in the publishing industry caused an intense focus on the bottom line, but that line has been raised to a height that fewer and fewer writers can meet. When my first book was published in 1982, it sold thirty-five hundred copies, a first sale respectable enough that my publisher requested a second novel. Today, many publishers won't consider a book unless they expect it to sell twenty-five to thirty thousand hardcover copies. More than half the nation's book sales take place in price clubs, where books and toilet paper are viewed simply as different forms of trees.

The writer's difficult journey is from silence to speech. The forces of silence can come as readily from the market as from a totalitarian state. If sales could silence Herman Melville, they can silence any writer.

—from a speech delivered on September 19, 1998, at the Upper Midwest Booksellers Association Trade Show in St. Paul, Minnesota

---

Sara Paretsky is the creator of detective V. I. Warshawski and author, most recently, of the novel *Ghost Story*.

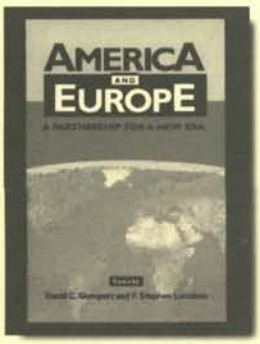
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Outstanding Scholarship from Cambridge

America and Europe

A Partnership for a New Era

David C. Gompert *and*
F. Stephen Larrabee, *Editors*



"The RAND book thoughtfully focusses on the urgent need for a reinvigorated trans-Atlantic relationship and suggests creative ways to give it new life."

—Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State

"A book to help us think—energetically, carefully, creatively—about the way Europe and America interact. Read, be stimulated, and enjoy these penetrating essays."

—George P. Shultz, former Secretary of State

Contributors: *David C. Gompert, Ronald D. Asmus, Gregory F. Treverton, James A. Thomson, John Van Oudenaren, F. Stephen Larrabee, Zalmay Khalilzad, John Roper*

Rand Studies in Policy Analysis

0-521-63367-2 Paperback $19.95

Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian, Inc.

Mick Gidley

From the 1890s onward, Edward S. Curtis took thousands of photographs of Native Americans all over the West. These were published (1907-1930) in twenty volumes of illustrated text and twenty portfolios of photographs; the project was supported by Theodore Roosevelt and funded in part by J. Pierpont Morgan, and spawned exhibitions, post-cards, magazine articles, lecture series, a "musicale," and the very first narrative documentary film. Neither a eulogy to Curtis' achievement nor a debunking of it, this book is an honest study of the project as a collective whole.

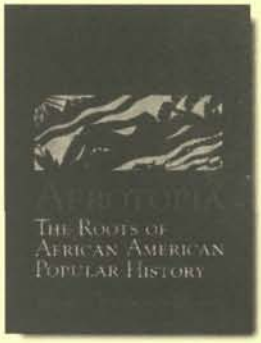
0-521-56335-6 Hardback $59.95

Available in bookstores or from

Afrotopia

The Roots of African American Popular History

Wilson Jeremiah Moses



Afrocentrism and its history have long been disputed and controversial. In this important book, Moses presents a critical and nuanced view of the issues. Tracing the origins of Afrocentrism since the eighteenth century, he examines the combination of various popular mythologies, some of them mystical and sentimental, others perfectly reasonable. A level presentation in what is often a shouting match, *Afrotopia* is a rich history of black intellectual life and the concept of race.

Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture 118

0-521-47408-6 Hardback $54.95
0-521-47941-X Paperback $17.95

Now in paperback...

The Sense of the People

Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785

Kathleen Wilson

"This much anticipated re-examination of English urban political culture builds upon the scholarship of a generation and formulates a narrative of political change that makes imperial considerations crucial.... This book is a welcome advance in understanding, and an invitation to further work."

—The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History

"...this book, by virtue of its broad vision and sense of change, its probings in depth, and its chronological sweep provides us with an important new perspective on eighteenth-century English politics."

—Daniel A. Baugh, Albion

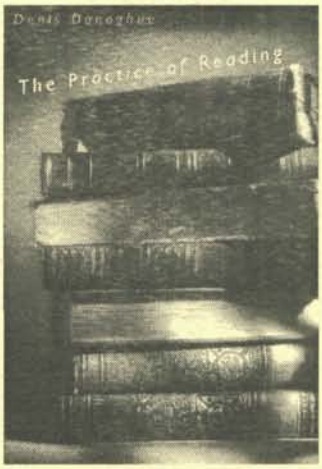
Past and Present Publications

0-521-63527-6 Paperback $24.95

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211
Call toll-free 800-872-7423. Web site: http://www.cup.org
MasterCard/VISA accepted. Prices subject to change.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



The Practice of Reading

Denis Donoghue

"Donoghue belongs to the small group of senior literary authorities who sustain our contemporary literary culture. This book gives an impressive new sense of his historical scope and flexibility of both taste and critical method."—Margery Sabin

"*The Practice of Reading* is **the best of all Donoghue's books.** It is so not only by virtue of its unfailing provision of relevant information but because it is probably of all his work the most timely."—Frank Kermode

A Selection of The Readers' Subscription
$30.00

New in cloth and paper

A Ved Mehta Reader

The Craft of the Essay

Ved Mehta

"This is **a very fine collection of work by an exceptionally distinguished writer.** It stands as a model for admirable, high-level reportage on cultural and intellectual issues and may well become a classic in advanced college writing courses."
—Stephen Koch

$40.00 cloth; $18.00 paperback

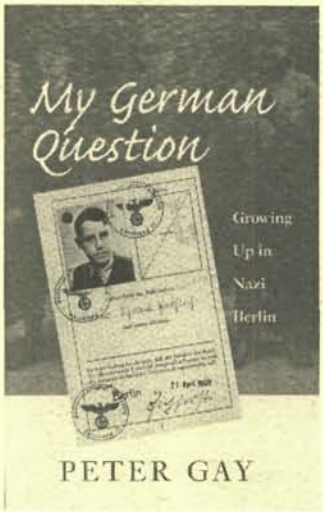
The Pale of Words

Reflections on the Humanities and Performance

James Anderson Winn

"**James Winn's brilliant quartet of essays** . . . provides us with a stunningly convincing history of the arguments that have produced the divisions from which the arts and humanities suffer at the turn of the new millennium. It is the most important book I have read in a decade."
—Robert Freeman

12 musical examples $20.00



My German Question

Growing Up in Nazi Berlin

Peter Gay

"**A searching, sensitive portrait of Gay's youth**, as crystalline as memory can be made."—*Booklist*

"Not the least interesting part of [Gay's] moving book, a book that he says is the "story of a poisoning and how I dealt with it," is the account of his personal Vergangenheitsbewältigung—the process by which he came to terms with his own past."
—Gordon Craig, *The New York Review of Books* 50 illus. $22.50

Now available in paper

Language and Silence *Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*

George Steiner

"**An extraordinarily sharp, brilliant, and thoughtful discussion** of the strange conditions into which modern writing has worked itself. . . . Few, very few writers today have as much that is worthwhile to say on today's writing as does the author."—Joseph G. Harrison, *Christian Science Monitor* $18.00 paperback

Yale University Press

P.O. Box 209040, New Haven, CT 06520
www.yale.edu/yup/ • 1-800-YUP-READ

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED